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RALPH DARNELL

BY

MEADOWS TAYLOR

ABRIDGED AND ANNOTATED

BY

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WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

BY

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PREFACE

THE aim of this series—*The Indian Students' Library*—is to provide convenient editions of the best books written by English authors on India and on Indian subjects. It is hoped that Indian students of the English language will find in these works an adequate representation of the life with which they are familiar. Most teachers of English in India will agree that one of their chief difficulties is the choice of suitable reading material for their pupils. At those stages of instruction that precede University study, and for some time after Matriculation, the aim of the teacher must be linguistic rather than literary. For this reason it is expedient to direct the student to such books as deal with the history, the life, the religion and the customs of his native land. In this way unnecessary and unfair difficulties of subject are avoided; and the mind of the reader is free to engage itself with matters of language, while his interest is comfortably sustained.

From this point of view the individual books of this series have been selected; and in dealing with the original texts the following arrangements have been made :—

- (1) The story has been preserved in the order of its development. The omissions made through exigencies of space do not affect either the sequence of the plot, or the original scheme of the author.
- (2) Whatever has been considered unsuitable for the school or college class-room has been removed. This has affected the original text very slightly; as no works, in themselves really unsuitable for the perusal of young readers, have been included in this series.

- (3) For the convenience of the teacher, each chapter has been divided into sections with an appropriate title. Each section is a self-contained unit with an interest of its own, and it should form a useful class lesson in itself.
- (4) There is an introduction to each book giving the essential facts of the author's career and some literary criticism of his work. This has been written mainly for the teacher. The notes have been made as brief as possible, and deal only with the outstanding difficulties of the text.

In the selection of books for a series of this kind, the range of choice is not unlimited. In some cases it is necessary to go outside of India, and to select works that deal with the East in general; and in other cases it is expedient to introduce memoirs and records of travel that may not have been written by Englishmen. But no work has been selected that does not provide a model of pure and simple English.

It is sometimes forgotten that there is a literature of British India; and that the history of India for a hundred years after Warren Hastings has something more to show than petty wars and domestic legislation. If this series is successful in reviving interest in a literature that deals primarily with Indian things, and in introducing that literature to the young Indian student, one object of its production will have been suitably achieved.

INTRODUCTION

PHILIP MEADOWS TAYLOR was born in Liverpool in 1808. At the age of fifteen he was sent to Bombay to enter a business house ; but, as his position and prospects had been misrepresented, he welcomed the opportunity of enlisting in the service of the Nizam of Hyderabad. A military commission was obtained for him through the influence of Mr. William Newnham of the Bombay Government. This kindness was never forgotten ; and to his friend in 1840 Colonel Taylor dedicated the second of his novels, *Tippu Sultan*.

From 1824, the year of his entering the service of the Nizam, until 1860, when failing health compelled his return to Europe, his duties were both civil and military. Up to the year 1841 his work lay chiefly with the Nizam's army and was relieved by one lengthy visit to England during which he published the ' Confessions of a Thug '. From 1841 to 1853 he was stationed in the principality of Shorapur. He then took over charge of one of the five Berar districts ceded by the Nizam ; and in 1858 he returned to Shorapur as Commissioner. At no period was he directly in the employment of the Crown or of the Company. Throughout his whole Indian career he was in the Nizam's service ; and this may explain in part his intimacy with and sympathy for all classes of the Indian community. In 1860 he retired to Europe ; and in 1876 while returning from India which he had revisited, he died at Mentone in the south of France.

Colonel Taylor's career covers roughly the half century leading up to the Indian Mutiny and the abolition of Company rule. In the light of his experiences of that famous time he looked back upon India's past, and endeavoured to interpret her history to his own people. His service in India began in the year of the First Burmese War, and lasted until Lord Canning's proclamation of peace after the Mutiny. Most of the important changes of this period took place during the tenure of office of Lords Bentinck, Dalhousie and Canning. Sati had been abolished. Education was not only introduced but generously established. Railways were opened. British

armies were successful against the Afghans and the Sikhs, and the Mutiny had been thoroughly quelled. In the employ of the Nizam's government, any prominent part in these great events was denied to Colonel Taylor ; but, if he held no distinguished military post in the Mutiny, his influence in preventing the spread of anarchy was of the greatest value. His district of Berar had an important geographical position. His firm control of this area, his influence over the people and the love they bore him, effectually hindered the advance of sedition into the Nizam's dominions.

The events of this time are fully detailed in the autobiography entitled *The Story of My Life*. This is a document of great historical value, throwing light upon the conditions of Indian and Anglo-Indian life in the earlier period of the reign of Queen Victoria. It abounds with references to the outstanding men of that time, and reveals a breadth of view and a capacity for sympathy that are often thoughtlessly denied to the founders of the British Empire in India. Such debatable subjects as education, and the progressive measures of a reformer like Lord Dalhousie, were accepted by Colonel Taylor in the most enlightened spirit of sympathy with the aspirations of the Indian people. In the educational controversy of that time between the supporters of the ancient oriental classics and the advocates of English and the vernaculars as the medium of instruction, he appears to have taken a prominent and decisive part. In his letters to the *Times* he supported the view set forth in the famous minute of Macaulay ; and later he wrote : ' I have never regretted the part I took in this discussion when I see the noble results which have been already attained, and are rapidly advancing year by year all over India, in all its regions and in all its vernacular languages.' Equally interesting are his comments upon the work of Lord Dalhousie whom he described as ' the most practically useful and single-minded ruler that India has ever possessed. His great mind took in every question with a singular clearness, and he improved everything he touched. To him India owes electric telegraphs, railways, extension of practical education,

large irrigation projects, roads and the removal of many disabilities under which Indians suffered. At no period of Indian history has the administration of India been so admirably conducted.' Enough has been quoted to show the attitude of Colonel Taylor to the progressive measures of his time, and to justify, if any justification were needed, the introduction of his literary work to young Indian readers.

His career as a man of letters began early. In 1837, the year of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne, the novel known as *The Confessions of a Thug* was begun. This work was undertaken during the author's convalescence after a severe attack of fever. He says : ' I wrote the *Confessions* to amuse myself, reclining in an easy chair, with a board on my knees, for I was too weak to sit up much—little thinking that they would ever be printed.' In 1839 the first edition was published in England, and it aroused great curiosity and interest. Queen Victoria herself read the work as it was passing through the press. Colonel Taylor was well qualified to write about the Thugs. In the early days of his service under the Nizam he had begun to investigate their habits ; but his military duties demanded his whole attention, and the complete investigation of Thuggee was accomplished by Colonel Sleeman who, by the year 1832, had produced such evidence as roused the whole of India and England to a state of horrified curiosity. Any work on this subject by a writer who had himself been in contact with the Thugs, and knew their habits, was likely to be successful. Colonel Taylor soon found himself in the position of a popular author from whom the reading public demanded further efforts. He writes in the autobiography : ' The *Confessions* have been received with much greater interest and success than I had ever ventured to hope for. It was curious to hear people wondering over the book and discussing it, and evidently the subject was a new sensation to the public. I was asked also to write another book, which should take the place of an historical novel, and become the forerunner of a series of such Indian works, and Tippu Sultan was chosen as the subject.'

This second novel was published in 1840. The series which it foreshadowed was actually completed, but at a much later date, in the leisure of the author's retirement in England. The historical novels in their order were as follows :—

- (1) *Tara* : this was published in 1863. It describes the development of the power of the Mahrattas and the blow struck by them against the Mahomedans in 1657.
- (2) *Ralph Darnell* : this was published in 1865. Its subject is the rise of the British power in India and the victory of Plassey, 1757.
- (3) *Secta* : this was published in 1872. It describes the events of the Mutiny in 1857.

These works illustrate the great modern periods of Indian history at exact intervals of one hundred years. Of the three *Tara* was the most ambitious, and its success was considerable. This was all the more pleasing to the author as he had kept silence for more than twenty years from the time of his writing the *Confessions* and *Tippu Sultan*. One other novel, *A Noble Queen*, with Chand Bibi as heroine, was produced in 1875, and in 1877, the year after Colonel Taylor's death, his daughter issued his autobiography. If his many contributions to the *Times* on political subjects be excluded, a brief history of India completes the list of his literary works. This was written in order to provide for the student and the general reader a single narrative of the main events of Indian history in an accessible form. The work was published in 1871 after two years of patient study and research.

Ralph Darnell is the second novel in the series projected in 1839 and completed in 1872 by the publication of *Secta*. It describes 'a blow still more momentous in character that fell upon all native powers in India, Mahomedan and Mahratta alike, by the foundation of a political authority which, heretofore insignificant, rose into immediate action after the battle of Plassey—' Meadows Taylor at the close of his preface to the novel says 'I have endeavoured to invest it with such English interest as was, in many instances, common to the

period.' There is, accordingly, in *Ralph Darnell* very much that has no bearing on India. Of its five 'parts' only two, the third and the fourth, deal directly with India itself. In the other 'parts' the story is concerned with English life and India is the merest incident. It has been necessary, therefore, in following out the main aim of 'The Indian Students' Library' to confine our story to 'part' three and 'part' four of the original. But in so doing we have kept 'the sequence of the plot and the original scheme of the author.' The original story is long and involved: the Indian portion is a story within a story and is really self-contained, with an interest all its own that suffers no loss by being abridged and cut out of the novel. A brief reference in the notes to Ralph's family history is all that is necessary to explain how he finds himself in India.

The plot of our abridgement is chiefly concerned with the fortunes of the Nawab Suraj-oo-Doula. His character is wholly contemptible but it serves to bring out into strong relief the extraordinary nobility and sweetness of his imprisoned Begum and the latent strength and resolution of Sozun. There is also a sympathetic portrayal of Noor Khan, the leader of the Rohillas serving in the Nawab's army. Clive the far-sighted soldier is admirably contrasted with those Englishmen who thought only of immediate trading profits. Ralph himself, as befits the hero of an historical romance, is a worthy young man, steadfast and sober in moral character, well able to hold his own among his associates and ever ready to be up and doing something for his country whenever the call should come.

The story has its exciting and dramatic moments. The reader will probably agree that the account of the Nawab's last march is full of them. The wonderful devotion and fearlessness of Sozun is well depicted and the manner in which the mutilated Derwesh is made the unrelenting instrument of retribution is most striking. That the Nawab should have fallen into his clutches is doubtless due to 'the long arm of coincidence' but it enables the author to wind up his tale with an impressive display of poetic justice.

Colonel Meadows Taylor had learned in the school of Scott to conjure up the past as a romantic picture and to create alternately the ideal and the realistic human type. With his great teacher he had much in common. Both were busy men of affairs to whom literature was, at least to begin with, a gentlemanly pastime. Both loved the outdoor life and both were sportsmen. A simple dignity of purpose marked the character of both ; and this has been beautifully expressed by Colonel Meadows Taylor when, at the close of his life, he referred to his literary work and wrote : ‘ I wanted to bring India nearer to England—to bring its people nearer to our people ; and if, by my simple descriptions of eastern life, any have felt more interest in their Indian brothers and sisters, or have been led to read and study more, my object has been attained.’

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CHAPTER I

THE NAWAB AND HIS SLAVE

1. *Sozun*

‘ART thou content now, my soul? or is there any desire at thy heart which I can fulfil? If there be, tell me. If it be on the world’s face, it shall be got for thee. I would not see one frown on thy brow, or hear a sigh from thy heart, Sozun, and that thou well knowest. But I am weary now, and thou must sing to me—wearied of all my court, of never-ending advice and counsel, of my mother’s vain grief, of my friends and of my enemies, of all but thee, my life—my soul—for thou art ever fresh, ever beautiful! Sing to me, sweet one, one of those old mountain songs of thine, soft and low, for my brain is dizzy.’ It was the Nawab who was speaking to his slave, Sozun.

‘So soon weary, my lord,’ said the girl, ‘and thy power but just begun? Were I like thee I would not be weary. Hast thou not a kingdom, a brave army, wealth, and all newly come to thee? Wherefore, then, art thou weary?’

‘Nay, nay, Sozun, no sage advice from thee,’ he replied. ‘Thou art my refuge from all this, which hath made my head throb and my heart sick. Sing to me, then, my soul, while I listen and forget.’

The girl took up a small battered lute, tuned it, and began one of those old mountain airs in her own mother tongue, which still lingered in her memory. Years ago she had sung this to her mother, to her father in the camp by night, and to rough men who gathered round their little tent of spears and horse cloths. The lute was her own, which, part of the gipsy’s plunder of her dead father, she had begged for, and kept ever since. She was changed now, but the song was not changed nor the old memories which came thick upon her as

looked upon her master, whom the soft low song had lulled to slumber. Was she happy? All she had dreamed of as belonging to wealth and power was in her grasp already, for the last obstacle to the complete possession of them had departed with the old Nawab. Was she happy with it all? I think not then, with those old memories, dim and faded as they were, but sweeter and more precious nevertheless, lying at her heart.

Suraj-oo-Doulah was asleep. 'For this,' said the girl, scornfully, as she cast her eyes over the recumbent figure—'for this I am what I am, and but a slave after all. Better free, even at the old trade, and the praise of thousands ringing in my ears and swelling my heart; and, better than all, dead—and yet not so. Can I not rule that thing, and make him serve my will?'

She put down the instrument with a heavy sigh, opened the carved window-screen gently, and looked out of the balcony. It was high above the ground, and from it she saw the broad river, with a few boats sailing lazily with the stream, which glittered in the heat. Below, a company of gay horsemen and some foot-soldiers were leaving the outer court of the palace, and the town seemed asleep in the blaze of light which fell upon it, for about the streets no one was stirring.

On this day, the first great durbar assembly of the young prince had been held. It had been the first public declaration of his accession; and after the reception of all his courtiers, the leaders of his troops, his ministers of state, and the leading bankers and merchants of his own city, and the English factory at Cossim Bazaar, it was perhaps not strange that the young Nawab was weary.

She to whom he had spoken, however, was not so, and her thoughts were very busy. Gradually she had come to understand the nature of the man to whom her destiny had linked her; and the more she knew of it the more deeply she resolved that it should not overcome her. It would be strange, perhaps, were anything of love combined with this. Of all the cautions she had received from her instructress, the most constant was, that she must shut her heart to love. She had to gain

honour in her art, to gain wealth and power, but must harden her heart against all else ; and hitherto these mercenary teachings had been followed with a hardness in execution which had excited Chunda Kour's perfect admiration. She had no rule of life but her own, and its precepts were hereditary. Other women might marry, might have children to love them, might love themselves ; but one like her, a Tuwâif, never ! To do so would be to sacrifice all, present and to come.

Still he slept. That weary youth, with whom her destinies were linked, lay calmly before her. She knew him to be in her power. She believed, and believed truly, that of all about him—kindred, slaves, ministers, and creatures of his power—she alone was beloved. If in such a mind any love could exist, she had awakened and possessed it. She knew his heart to be cruel, rapacious, vindictive, insolent, and tyrannical. A coward, a profligate, and a traitor, she could not conceal from herself that he might some day turn on her unexpectedly, and destroy her as he had destroyed others. The girl even shuddered at the idea for an instant ; but the next, had closed her teeth fiercely under the influence of the passionate thoughts which flashed through her brain. No ; whatever he was—hated, despised, dreaded—the Nawab Suraj-oo-Doulah was at least hers ; and with this assurance, a feeling of tenderness she had never before experienced—a fascination, as it were, she could not resist—had arisen slowly but surely, and was growing on her in spite of her precautions. It would be strange and unnatural, indeed, if any human mind could exist without the germ of such feeling, which time and opportunity might call into action.

'Tell me,' she said, when he awoke at length, and stretched himself, holding out his arms as if to caress her—'tell me, my lord, what happened to-day in the durbar ? Thou art my debtor for that sweet sleep, and to this old lute for playing thee to rest, and I ask payment.'

'I will tell thee, Sozun,' he said, as she seated herself by him, and his hand passed fondly over her fair cheek 'though thou wilt hardly care for our state doings and quarrels. Dost thou care, my soul ?'

'My lord's friends are my friends, and his enemies are my enemies,' she replied, as her bosom heaved. 'If his slave's counsel is but that of a woman, it is at least sincere and true, and may be useful, my—'

'Nay, enough, Sozun,' he replied, putting his hand on her mouth. 'Who doubts thee, my pearl? Not I, by the Prophet. Thou shalt know all, and welcome. Listen. There was a servant of my father's who held a high place, and collected and embezzled much of the revenue. He died. His son has left his post with all his wealth, and has taken refuge in the Feringi fort at Calcutta, and defies me. What wouldst thou do?'

'Do?' cried the girl, her eyes flashing—'do? Thou, the Nawab of Bengal, whose bread they eat, under the shadow of whose splendour these Feringis live! and thou askest me? Do? I will tell thee. Give me thy army. I, Sozun, thy slave and a woman, will lead it to Calcutta—raze every stone of this Kaffir fort to the ground—and bring away that vile thief in defiance of them. Who are they that have eaten this abomination?'

'They are rich merchants, who bring hither stores of English goods—Kaffirs, and utter abominations to the faith of Islam; and I hate them, Sozun—I hate them because they do not fear me. One came to-day to the durbar from the Bazaar. It was he, I know well, who sent on that thief and traitor; and he behaved insolently before every one present. He looked round with an air of defiance, as though he were the Nawab, and I the Kaffir merchant, crouching at his feet.'

'I would have had him seized and put in irons,' cried the girl.

'I would rather have hanged him in the market-place, or tied him to the foot of an elephant, to have his Kaffir soul trampled out of him,' he replied, savagely; but their time is not come yet.

'Why not, my lord?' she asked; 'are men afraid of these Feringis?'

He laughed bitterly. 'My father was, but I am not, Sozun; I do not fear them,' he said. 'Men say they have received more guns from their ships, and have strengthened their fort. No, I fear them not; but,

strange to say, my mother loves them ! She sent for me to-day, and besought me not to quarrel with them. They were under the Emperor's protection, she said, and my father's and she would not have the old agreements broken. I was angry with her, and I swore on the Koran which lay by her, that I would have revenge for their insulting defiance, and left her. I have written once more to Drake, who is in Calcutta, and if he gives up this thief Kissun-das, he is safe for the present ; if not—Allah ! he will rue it. '

'Thou wilt take me with thee to see the English Kaffirs and their ships, and the English shops ! Ha, ha ! ' she cried, clapping her hands ; ' and thou shalt have thy revenge on all. '

'Yes, I will have it, Sozun, ' he muttered through his teeth, ' if I hang those cursed Feringis, every one of them, upon their own walls ; and thou shalt see it, too. I swear to thee. '

2. *The Begum*

'And what of her, my lord ? ' said the girl, almost with hesitation, after a silence which he did not care to interrupt.

'Curse her ! ' said the Nawab, rising, and striking the cushion on which he was lying ; ' why did they ever marry me to her—a poor puling thing, who hates me, and whom I hate as I hate the Feringis. What of her ? She is safe from thee, my rose—safe for many a day to come, I hope, and she may rot where she is, in the vault below. Thou mayest go, if thou dost not believe me, and look at her. If she die soon, there will be one the less for thee to fret about. '

'I do not fret about her, my lord, ' she replied, scornfully ; ' I hate her as thou dost, as I would hate anything that came between thee and me. Ah, thou lovedst her once, they tell me. '

'Till I saw thee, Sozun ? Never ! But let that pass. What more have I to tell thee ? A thousand things trouble me—of treachery, of plots, of intrigues. I know n yet whom to trust or whom to fear ; but time will sh. all. There are French Feringis and English Fering

who thirst for each other's blood, and if the French will join me, they might have the English Fort; but they dare not, for there is peace between their nations. I dread Meer Jaffier, with his smooth tongue and hollow heart, and he is too powerful for me to lay hands upon. I dread the bankers and their intrigues. I dread—'

'Thou shalt fear nothing,' cried the girl, warmly—'no, not the fiend himself—while I am with thee, my lord. Strike boldly down all that oppose thee. If these English Feringis are strong, strike them down first, that men may tremble and obey. My lord is young in power yet, and needs to prove it. You said she was in the vault below: let me but see her there, and I am content till I see Calcutta blazing, and my lord victorious.'

'Go, then,' he replied. 'Nasir will take thee;' and he clapped his hands.

One of the eunuchs without entered, and put up his hands, listening.

'Take him with thee,' said the Nawab; 'he will show thee the place. The way is private.'

Sozun followed the man, and they descended by a private stair, which, long as she had been in the palace, she had never remarked before. When they reached the foundation vaults, the man stopped before a door on which was a heavy padlock, unlocked it, and pushed it open. Except by a narrow loophole, above which some green leaves were waving, there was no other light. The place had a damp, dank smell; but it was swept, and on a pallet in a corner lay a slight figure, which rose as Sozun entered, and, drawing her white muslin scarf over her face more closely, asked in a gentle, girlish voice, 'Who art thou? and why art thou come here?'

'Look at me,' said Sozun, advancing close to her. 'Thou hast heard of me, lady, enough I daresay. Thou art Suraj-oo-Doulah's wife; and I—No matter, I am Sozun, his slave. Ah, he did not tell me how beautiful thou art! Dost thou know that I hate thee, O Begum!'

'I am very helpless,' was the reply, 'and wish to die. Why does he not kill me? O Allah! just and merciful, wilt thou behold such tyranny! Even as thou wilt, as thou wilt, O Lord!' and she sat down sobbing.

'He is mine, lady,' resumed Sozun, in a hard voice—'mine, and cannot be thine. There is no peace between us, and if thou wert dead it would be well, or if I were dead it would be well.'

'Hast thou no pity in thy heart? Why does he not let me go?' she returned.

'Pity, lady? None for thee, as thou hast none for me. No, thou canst not go hence; it would not be seemly.'

'I would not harm thee—I never harmed thee,' she replied, gently. 'Let me go. What have I done to thee?'

'You would, you would!' cried Sozun, passionately. 'You would drive me forth, you would trample on me if you dared, you would urge him to destroy me, as you have done before, and you know it, lady! It is my time now—why should I have pity? Have Afghans ever pity? I have none.'

'If I could only die,' said the lady, sighing dreamily, 'there would be peace and rest. I have no friend but thee, O Lord!—none but thee!'

'Ameen,' returned Sozun, bitterly—'ameen! May the good God and the Prophet hear thee!'

They were both silent. The lady was sitting upon the edge of her pallet, covering her face with her muslin scarf, and sobbing piteously. The other, standing over her triumphant; a gorgeous shawl of Benares tissue, crimson and gold, floating around her head and person, beneath which a petticoat of cloth-of-gold swept to the floor. Had the lady looked up, she would have seen her own jewels displayed upon the dancer's arms and hands, and one priceless diamond which, in the light which fell on them from the loop-hole, flashed as the girl's bosom heaved under her excitement.

'Dost thou see these?' she cried, waving her hands and arms, on which the jewels sparkled. 'Dost thou know them? They were thine, lady, and are now mine. Enough; I have seen thee, and will remember and dread thy beauty; and thou wilt not forget Sozun, the Afghan slave.'

With these cruel words she turned, and when the door closed, and the clash of her anklets grew fainter an

fainter, the lady bowed herself to the ground, and thanked God for the departure of her cruel enemy.

'I have seen her, my lord,' said Sozun to the Nawab, when she returned to him, 'and I have seen enough. Though didst not tell me she was so lovely. By Allah! thou wert a fool to take me instead of her.'

'And thou a fool to say so, Sozun,' he replied, sharply; 'but we need not quarrel. Is she safe, and art thou content?'

'Is she fed, my lord?'

'Surely,' was the reply. 'Thou wouldst noth ave me do murder, Sozun? and for thee?'

The girl laughed scornfully. 'No,' she replied, 'not on her. It will be my care to feed her daintily, that she may live, and that I, Sozun, may look on her as I wish. Yes, she is safe, and I will keep her so, even from thee, my lord—even from thee. I have taken the key. I am more to be trusted with it than Nasir perhaps.'

'Thou art a devil!' cried the young man, starting to his feet, 'but so beautiful that I dare not harm thee.'

'Ah, my lord,' she replied, caressing him, 'if I am as precious to thee as thou sayest I am, I need to protect myself for my lord's sake. Thy wife is a royal lady, and I am only a poor Afghan soldier's child. She hath friends, but I have none save myself—and thee.'

CHAPTER II

THE DURBAR AND THE DERWESH

1. *The Durbar*

SOME weeks had elapsed, but the young Nawab had as yet shown no sign of offensive operations against the English. A trustworthy envoy had been despatched to Calcutta in disguise, bearing a letter to the chief of the English Factory, expressing anger at the increase of fortifications, and demanding in very peremptory terms the surrender of the vassal and servant who had taken refuge there. This emissary had not been fortunate.

He had found the Factory officials alarmed and cautious, and he was not only denied admittance to the fort, but, being dismissed beyond its boundaries as a spy, in an ignominious manner, had returned to his master, not only full of revengeful determination in regard to his own injuries, but as a very firebrand to the train already prepared to explode ; for his tale fell upon willing ears. The Nawab had listened to it with a triumph he could ill conceal, and there were few present in that evening council in the palace who ventured to cross the young man's vindictive temper, or to point out the ultimate danger of the now meditated enterprise.

Perhaps indeed few, if any, could see its existence. The force of the English in Calcutta was accurately known, and seemed utterly insignificant. Each selfish in regard to individual ends and interests, it was not probable that any coalition of the European Factories would take place ; and the Nawab knew for certain that, although the French would not openly break with him and espouse the cause of the English, they would greatly rejoice at their discomfiture. The French congratulations upon his accession had been peculiarly acceptable and submissive ; and though he had received like courtesies from the English, the tone of independence which was perceptible in their letters had appeared to him, and to his councillors, little less than offensive arrogance. His own mind had been made up long ago ; but to Sozun, the action she longed to see him engaged in had been delayed almost past endurance.

At home there were no enemies who showed themselves. Those who had supported other pretensions, or were supposed to do so, had been dealt with summarily and vindictively ; but I need not detail any of these events. What the native historians of his own period as well as ours have depicted, Suraj-oo-Doulah had proved himself to be ; and for recent, as well as former acts, many among his own people were already weary of him, though where relief could come from was not perceptible. Time was, when the outcry of the people of a Mogul province found hearing in the imperial court at Delhi but that was past listening now : or when commanders

imperial armies, serving in provinces, preserved the honour of the empire untarnished ; but the armies of the Nawab held no allegiance to Delhi ; they were in his own pay, and he believed them devoted to his interests. He had bestowed large largesses upon them out of his father's treasures, and every officer supposed to be unsound had been dismissed or removed. Upon those who were about him, then, the young man had strong reliance ; and it was with a company of them, and of his ordinary courtiers and officials, that he had heard that afternoon the story of his agent's disgrace, and of the implied insult to himself.

'We are fallen somewhat low, my friends,' said the Nawab, looking round the apartment as the relation was concluded, 'when we hear that a few Kaffir Feringis have defied our power, and have sent back our messenger with a blackened face ! It seems to them, perhaps, that the glory and valour of the men of Islam has departed ; and the swords which were red one day, that some here remember, in the blood of those infidel Mahrattas, are now washed in rose-water, sheathed, and laid by. What think ye, my friends ? Is our cup full enough, or are we to have more abomination poured into it ? Speak, Moulvee Sahib ! you are the elder here, and have the experience of two generations. Nay, friends, be silent,' he continued, as many cried out passionately : 'let the holy man speak, that we may hear words of wisdom and inspiration.'

Moulvee Wullee-oo-Deen was the chief priest of the great mosque at Moorshedabad ; and, as his office required of him, was not only learned in all ceremonials and observances, but an intense and furious bigot, especially famous for sermons against Christians. Hindus, truly, were abominable infidels ; but Christians were worse. Had they not impiously and defiantly broken the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham ? They were uncircumcised dogs : and in his virulent attacks upon them, this breach of covenant was always his strong point of argument. The Moslem priest was a tall, thin, sallow-faced man, with a large aquiline nose, retreating chin, and a straggling beard, the hairs of

which might be counted. His upper teeth were large and projecting, and his scraggy lean throat, barely concealed by a thin beard, seemed composed of bones and sinews only, with a few thick veins spreading over them, which swelled out, as did those in his forehead, when he began to speak and grew excited. But the Moulvee was already boiling over, and his sense of etiquette alone had prevented him interrupting the Nawab in the ironical speech he had just made.

'My lord! my lord!' he cried, 'let the vengeance of Allah descend upon them! How often have I raised this feeble voice in vain against these detestable Feringis! First, there was one ship and a few merchants, and one nation; now there are three nations and the ships come in fleets, like the flocks of birds at harvest time. I have no new words to speak. To my lord's honoured father, to the lady mother, my speech hath been ever the same. Curse them! I have cried as I do now—curse them!' he continued, raising his shrill voice to a scream—'curse them, drive them into the sea, and let my land be delivered from them for ever!'

'Ameen! ameen!' rose in a low murmur round the room, as those present twisted their moustaches, and grasped the hilts of their swords.

'What say the stars, my friend? How are these infidels' horoscopes and our own at present? Hast thou proved this, O Moulvee?' asked the Nawab.

'My lord,' cried the priest, 'I have no knowledge of this art; I only know what is written in the blessed Koran—'

'I know it too, Moulvee Sahib. May the grace of God be on the writer; but I would fain know how the planets point in this matter. Such art is beneath your holiness, that I know; but there may be those known to you who can assist us by it.'

'What need of the stars, my lord?' said a burly Tartar officer, who sat near. 'These are the best stars we can follow, which each of us bears by his side,' and he held up his sword.

The Moulvee turned on the speaker a scornful look as he replied, 'We have holy warrant for astrology, sir, and you are ignorant to despise it.'

'I don't know that we looked after the stars when Ali Verdy Khan told us to tighten our waistbands before we rode through those Kaffir Mahrattas,' retorted the Tartar, angrily; 'and if we had waited for them, they might have been long of coming. So may these stars of the accursed Feringis, who have thrown dirt on our beards. May their fathers burn in hell for it!'

'Peace!' cried the Nawab, interposing; 'when we know what our holy friend can tell us, we shall be the more sure; and thou, Moulvee Sahib, must see to it forthwith.'

'I think,' replied the priest, 'that this need not long be delayed. In the cloisters of the mosque a wise man hath resided for some days past, who hath wonderful power, my lord—wonderful! Mashalla, it is great! and he has bestowed amulets on the poor, which heal sickness as by a miracle. In your servant's family a case occurred but yesterday, in which the malice of many devils was frustrated; and yet the patient had long suffered. The Derwesh hath visited Beejapoor, and the shrine of Sofee Surmust, and that of the blessed Geesoo Duraz, at Gulbergah; and, in short, my lord, he is an apostle of charity, but he is rough and free-spoken. Will your Highness submit this matter to him? I know no other so worthy or so wise.'

'Inshalla!' cried the Nawab, whose well-known superstition was at once strongly excited—'Inshalla! How say you, my friends?'

When an Eastern ruler makes a proposition, there are few perhaps in his council hardy enough to oppose it; and except the old Tartar soldier, and some Hindus present, there were none certainly there who did not desire to see the Nawab's intention forthwith carried out. One, however, honoured and trusted perhaps beyond the rest—a secretary who had risen to distinction under the Nawab's father—was sitting behind the prince, and putting a handkerchief to his mouth, leant forward and whispered caution.

'This is no matter for public assembly, my Prince,' he said. 'Dismiss those that are here, and see to this matter in private. What if the result be unfavourable?'

Suraj-oo-Doulah laughed scornfully. He was in a reckless, defiant humour, and it was not safe to cross his purpose. 'If any one but thee, Anwar Ali,' he replied, 'had said that, he should have had his tongue cut out. Be silent, and do not lose your respect. Beware, I say!' and as the man shrank back terrified and trembling, silence fell upon the courtiers, which was only broken by the Nawab himself. 'Send for the man,' he said—'for this holy fakeer from Beejapoor, who is thy friend, Moulvee Sahib. Let him be brought forthwith.'

'God forbid!' returned the priest, lifting his joined hands. 'He is no *friend* of mine, only a poor disciple, my Prince, to whom I have imparted some mysteries of revelation. A rough fellow, my lord, and unlearned in all science, except that of his art. They say,' he added in a low tone, 'he was once an infidel Brahmin, but hath been converted to the faith.'

'Enough!' cried the Nawab; 'where are the players? We have had sufficient of this Feringi council. Let us see the Kaffirs themselves. Let them enter—they will make some fun for us.'

As he spoke, four men, dressed ludicrously in English costume of the period, and with whitened faces, preceded by others bearing a table and four chairs, with some glasses and a bottle, entered the hall: and having made their obeisance, seated themselves on the chairs, and, pretending to drink, made show of draining glass after glass, till the bottle was finished, and was replaced by another.

'Mercy of the Prophet!' exclaimed the Nawab, 'no one speaks.'

'May it please your Highness,' said another man, advancing, who acted as spokesman for the players, 'these Kaffirs never speak till the wine begins to get into their brains. If your Majesty will only wait.'

It was impossible to maintain gravity, and the Nawab and his courtiers burst into peals of laughter. The men, beginning to sway about in their chairs, as bottle after bottle was brought and supposed to be finished, held out their glasses to each other, clinked them together, and apparently tossed off the contents. One after another,

too, dipped his head under the table, and raised it up with his face changed from white to scarlet, and drank more furiously than before. At last one rose, and, steadying himself by the table, bawled out, 'De King—hip! hip! hooray!'—and the three others, also rising—echoed, 'De King—hip! hip! hooray!' and sat down again. No sooner had this been done than the first once more rose, and cried, 'De Coompani—hip! hip! hooray!' and was answered as before by a cry of, 'De Coompani—hip! hip! hooray!' After that, each man in quick succession bawled out other toasts, and filled his glass, while all together began to jabber an utterly unintelligible gibberish, in which a few coarse English words and oaths were intermingled. Presently, too, one of the players pretended to quarrel with another, and was pulled back by a third; and songs which had little tune, but of which the purport could not be mistaken, were howled independently, till the clamour and riot became indescribable, and the scene ended by one after another of the men tumbling from his chair to the ground.

'Protection of God!' cried the Nawab, holding his sides, 'is this the truth? The Feringis at Cossim Bazaar are not like this.'

'May I be your sacrifice?' cried the spokesman, in an attitude of supplication, 'your slaves have seen them all like this at Calcutta. There is no lie in it; and the next act is their dance, which is better still. Will my lord see it?'

2. *The Fakeer*

'The Fakeer is present,' said an attendant, 'and salutes my Prince.'

Suraj-oo-Doulah looked up as a remarkable figure advanced through the court, and stood before him without salutation.

'Salute the Nawab! salute the King!' cried many voices, but the man looked round him disdainfully, and said in a commanding voice, 'I never salute any but God,'—then turning to the mummers, part of whose performance he had unwillingly witnessed, he cried,—'Begone, ye shameless, thus to defile God's image! I

have seen the durbars of kings and princes of the faith from Constantinople to Delhi, but never, O Nawab, did I behold so shameless a scene as this. What dost thou require of me? Speak!' and the Fakeer drew himself up proudly, and looked around him.

A tall, gaunt figure, with matted hair twisted round his head; a long grey beard, partly turned over his ears; naked to the waist, with every bone of his attenuated body starting out under the skin in painful relief; a long purple and white cotton waist-cloth descending to his ankles, and a soft leopard skin depending from his shoulders. The Nawab had rarely beheld so weird a figure, and started at the abrupt and defiant address.

'Thou mightest use civil speech, friend,' he said haughtily.

'Nay, my lord,' whispered the priest, 'a holy man, and rough of speech, as I said; to be pardoned, therefore, as it is his custom. He knows no master but God.'

'Tell him what I want,' replied the Nawab in a surly tone, 'and let him depart in the devil's name, as soon as he has answered.'

'Come hither, friend,' said the priest, blandly, 'and sit down here by me,' and the Moulvee sidled away a little. 'His Highness hath need of thy art, and would know how the holy mysteries of thy science explain the planets in conjunction on the—on the—' and he looked to the Nawab, uncertain whether he should tell what had passed.

'My army is going to Calcutta,' said the Nawab, 'and I would know the result. Dost thou fear to speak?'

'Fear!' cried the man—'only slaves fear. I am the slave of God and the Prophet, and I fear not man. I will tell thee, but I will not sit in this assembly.'

For a few minutes the Fakeer was silent as it in prayer. He then took some silver tablets from his girdle and consulted them.

'Speak quickly,' cried the Nawab, 'and the less of thy mummery the better.'

'Listen,' said the Fakeer, solemnly. 'The conjunction of planets is good. For a year there is no change, and there will be victory to thee, O Nawab!'

'Victory!' echoed the Prince. 'Do you hear?—Victory!' and the words were taken up by all around, till the court resounded with the cry of 'Futteh-i-Nubbee! Victory to the Prophet!'

'Wouldst thou know more, Prince? It is not good what thy destiny reveals to me.'

'I fear not,' was the hard reply; 'but if thou liest, by Allah, thou hadst better never have seen me.'

'O Prince! a holy man, a holy man! His speech is privileged,' interposed the Moulvee, with a deprecatory gesture.

'Be silent,' said the Fakeer. 'If thou wilt hear listen to what I see in the future—defeat, misery, and to thy enemies triumph.'

'A lie! a lie!' shouted the Nawab; 'beat him on the mouth with a shoe.'

'I fear thee not,' continued the man, 'raving as thou art like a madman. God hears thee, impious man, and will smite thee. Beware of these Feringis, I say, and harm them not. They are true, they are charitable. When I lay sick to death at Bombay, they put me into their hospital; they fed and clothed me, and I love them. They are just and true, I say, and I honour them, and do not forget them. Enough! If they have to suffer they have to suffer. Ameen, ameen, and the grace of God be on them!'

'And the curse of the Shaitan be on thee, O foul tongued Derwesh!' cried the Nawab, savagely, with an obscene oath. 'Thou hast not forgotten them! Ah, well, thou shalt not forget me. Ahmed!—some of ye, cut off his ears—there, before me as he stands.'

Before the Fakeer could resist—before he could speak—he was pinioned, dragged back a few paces, and mutilated with a sharp knife. Bleeding and faint, he was buffeted into the outer court, and thence pushed into the street, followed by mocking shouts.

'Ya, Allah!' he cried, lifting his hands—red with his own blood which had streamed over his body—to the sky. 'O thou just God! wilt thou not avenge this? Enough for me that it is thy will!'

That night the Fakeer disappeared from the mosque, and was no more seen ; but we may meet him again.

‘ And now, my friends,’ said the Nawab, when the ears of the Fakeer had been displayed to him, ‘ we would be at rest. Be ready with your troops for to-morrow. Inshalla ! we will plunder the English shops at Cossim Bazaar, and there will be rare booty for all.’

‘ What was the disturbance in the durbar, my lord ? ’ asked Sozun, with a scared face, when the Nawab joined her in the zenana shortly afterwards.

‘ A mad Fakeer was insolent to me, and I had his ears cut off : wouldst thou like to see them ? ’ ‘ Take care I do not the same to thee some day,’ was the brutal reply. ‘ Sing to me, Sozun ; my spirit is disturbed to-night, and thou alone canst quiet it. Sing, dost thou hear ? Art thou like him, insolent ? ’

The girl took her little lute, and sang : but there was no heart in her sad song that night ; it had gone far away among the blue Afghan mountains, and would not return. ‘ Ah me, alas ! ’ she sighed, and burst into tears, as her master tossed restlessly on the bed where he had flung himself.

CHAPTER III

THE FACTORY, CALCUTTA, 1756

WHILE these scenes were passing at Moorshedabad, we may well believe that the gentlemen of the Calcutta Factory were not without serious apprehension. When Ralph Darnell landed, indeed, there was no suspicion of probable interruption to the general prosperity. Ali Verdy Khan was alive, and his life promised to be a long one. If a few of the most experienced men then feared, when the time did come, that a new succession to the throne of Ali Verdy Khan, for it was little else, would bring fresh demands and disturb existing rights—there were others who, despising such counsels, anticipated even greater extension of privileges, which as yet had experienced no serious interruption. Trade was

very active and very prosperous; and society was in accordance with its prosperity, free and reckless, not to say licentious and immoral. Ralph, as yet, had done no more than every fashionable man in London daily practised; but though by no means squeamish, he found, in the English society of Calcutta, harder drinking, coarser swearing, and deeper play than he had been accustomed to, and a general tone of profligacy which belonged, as it were, to a lower grade of society altogether. I am by no means desirous of claiming any remarkable amount of virtue for Ralph Darnell, or, as we must henceforth call him, Ralph Smithson, at this period of his life; but the old injunction of his uncle, that there never had been a Darnell that was not a gentleman, came more and more vividly to his remembrance as he witnessed, and often had to share, the orgies which were enacted, if not in the official Factory hall, at least in the private houses of the members and officers of the Factory.

He had been received by Mr. Wharton with great kindness and hospitality. The worthy Captain Scrafton, and the chief officer of the *Valiant*, the only persons to whom his real name and history were known, had kept his secret; and to Mr. Wharton the young well-mannered Englishman Ralph Smithson, in whom Mr. Darnell 'had an interest,' and who came to Calcutta so well provided with money, was very welcome; while his frank manners and cheerful disposition soon rendered him a very general favourite.

One great trial and danger of his life had passed away, and his spirits were hopeful and elastic. It was strange, perhaps, to Mr. Wharton, and far stranger to young men of his own age, to see Ralph careful and prudent, and on this account he was not so popular among his young friends there as he might otherwise have been. Perhaps Ralph's induction into gay life in England proved to be now of service to him. I am decidedly of opinion that it did; for it too often happens that those youths, sent direct from home influences and the strictest previous guidance into strange society, no sooner find themselves free from restraint, than they

plunge more madly than others into excesses of all kinds. Hot, dissipated youths, who drank arrack-punch every night, gambled, and did other naughty things which I need not detail—feared, while they respected or disliked, as it might be, the young Englishman who declined to join their excesses, and, holding himself aloof from intimacy, was only courteous and kind to all. But Ralph would allow no liberties to be taken with him, and every one came to know this in course of time.

Up to the period we are arrived at, Ralph had remained with Mr. Wharton as his guest. Mr. Wharton would not hear of his living in the chambers of the Factory, and presently grew so attached to him that what had been intended by Ralph as a temporary sojourn only, had now been protracted for several months, and was likely to be continued. Mr. Wharton had written to Mr. Darnell that he had lately married, and Julia Wharton had not been a wife for a year when Ralph arrived. One of the first parties in which the ladies and gentlemen of the Factory assembled together after Ralph's arrival, was to celebrate their wedding-day ; and a merry one it was, after Calcutta fashion, in the cold weather.

CHAPTER IV

DISQUIET

1. The Nawab takes action

TROUBLES were coming fast upon that small English settlement ; and as the days passed drearily, the rumours which were hourly arriving in Calcutta were confirmed by news of overt acts on the part of the young Nawab, or Subah, as he was generally denominated, for which we have already accounted. I do not think it necessary to detail the native political events at Moorshedabad ; but I may mention that, on the ostensible pretence of coercing a refractory vassal, the Subah had ordered his army to march, and had accompanied it. He did not,

however, proceed to the first declared destination of his forces ; but turned suddenly on the English Factory at Cossim Bazaar, twenty miles below his capital, and invested the place ; making prisoners of the few English gentlemen there, and appropriating all the spoils. Here was the first victory gained, and a bloodless one too, for there were no local means of resisting an attack by fifty thousand men. The poor gentlemen had written to Calcutta in their sore strait for help ; but there was none to be had, and none could have reached them in time to prevent what, indeed, was not to be averted.

After that, deprecatory letters to the young Subah were written from Calcutta, with grave remonstrances and reminders of ancient friendship and of the imperial deeds and grants of Delhi ; but to very little purpose, except to confirm the Nawab's idea, that the English were, after all, helpless beggars, and thus make him resolve once for all that their ancient arrogance was to be humbled to the dust. It was in vain that the kind old Begum, the Nawab's mother—always friendly to Englishmen—besought her son not to molest them. She would become peacemaker, she said, and restore the former good understanding. All she could effect, however, was to save the lives of the gentlemen who had given themselves up, trusting to her son's honour, and to preserve them, in some measure, from ill-usage and indignity.

Sozun was urging on her royal lover, and his good mother's warnings were cast to the winds. Perhaps, indeed, he needed little urging. Cruel and vindictive by nature, as he had ever been, he could ill brook opposition at any time. Now the counsels of the Afghan girl accorded with his own. Her fierce, passionate nature was developing itself, and his own had blended with it to ensure the rejection of any peaceful advice. Advocacy of the English cause had been interdicted ; and whosoever had dared to offer any, might well have said his last prayer, and made himself ready for death or mutilation, as he proposed it.

Under these circumstances, what bootied the English letters of remonstrance, the reiterations of no offence

being intended, or the denial of new fortifications? Offence had been given; some new defences, under the apprehension of French attacks, had undoubtedly been constructed. The old system of bribery of officers to propose deprecatory offerings to their masters, which had often succeeded in the days of the empire, was now hopeless. No one would dare to propose what might result in instant death, or disgrace.

And all this having happened, the council that sat in Calcutta Factory on the 7th day of June 1756 were left in no doubt whatever as to what awaited them, when they heard direct from the Cossim Bazaar Factory of what had been done there on the 2nd of that month, and that the Subah's army had, for the most part, marched for Calcutta itself, under his own personal command. The bloodless victory which I have recorded had but whetted the young ruler's appetite, and, had there been no other reason, very shame at delay would have urged him on.

'Thou wilt be less than a man,' had the Afghan girl said, 'if this be abandoned. Thy people will spit at thee, and the children will cry coward in the streets. None of thy slaves in the durbar dare tell thee this, but I fear not. If I cannot live for my own honour, I can live for thine.'

Perhaps such vehement adjuration was not needed; for the Nawab only laughed at his beautiful slave's enthusiasm, as he bid her be content, for she should see the English ships and the English treasury ere the month had passed, and she believed him now.

2. *Anxiety in Calcutta*

I have no need, then, to say that the council which sat in Calcutta that 7th of June was an anxious one. It was the end of the hot weather, and before the rain should fall the heat would be greater and greater. Those were not days of comfort in India: we Englishmen had not come to know how to live. In Calcutta, as everywhere else, it was for the most part a short life and a merry one. There were no good houses, no palaces as there are now. Some English-looking warehouses, a factory

hall and close chambers for the public servants, a barrack for the soldiers within the fort, and a few garden-houses without, where the air was fresher and cooler, with a church, completed 'the Factory.' There were few means of keeping out the heat, and little mitigation of it when it came into the houses, as it did fiercely on that 7th of June, when the English gentlemen sat in the great hall wiping their faces, and being fanned by their native servants.

What could they do? There were only a hundred and seventy-four soldiers there, many of whom were sick in hospital, and some weak convalescents. There were crews of ships to be sure, but these would be wanted on board. There was a large area to defend, and if the enemy were not checked at once, there was little hope of saving the settlement. There was great stress laid on this by the most experienced, and not without reason: for if the Subah once began to negotiate, they might hope to gain terms—hard enough perhaps—but still terms after all. What, however, if he refused all negotiation, as he had hitherto done?

There was certainly no aid to be had—neither the French nor the Dutch would, if they could, aid them. They offered shelter, if the English chose to leave all and come up the river to them. I believe that the French gentlemen at Chandernagore felt very easy at the prospect of their English guests; and, as war was expected shortly, had little hope of seeing their invitation accepted. Leave Calcutta? Leave the Honourable East India Company's goods and chattels? Their homes and their fort? There were the ships anchored before the Fort; and, if they pleased, if the worst came to the worst, nothing would be simpler than to get on board them and sail away as they had come: but what would they say in England?

The question has often been asked, and answered, for the most part, in the same way. I do not believe that all were brave in Calcutta that day—there were more despairing hearts there than it was pleasant to think about; but there were enough brave men to determine to fight the place to the last in any extremity, and these

were the majority, as they always will be wherever Englishmen are gathered together with any great national honour or stake to be defended, whether on the land or on the sea. So when the military gentlemen had gone over their musters again, and calculated their means of defence, they called to the butler for a bottle or two of the prime old Madeira, and drank, with a cheer which made the roof ring, to the 'Long life of the Company, and damnation to all Moors!' and felt their hearts stronger within them when they had done it.

When Mr. Wharton and Ralph Smithson walked up to the garden-house that hot evening, some of the preparations were in progress, some militia were being drilled, and Don Gomez, as the captain of a company, saluted them on the esplanade with a gravity worthy of a Silveira.

'Good evening, gentlemen' said the little Don, with a wave of his laced hat which would not have disgraced Birdcage Walk—'good evening. Now, 'tention men! Dere's Mr. Drake and Captain Minchin comin' up, and if dey sees you with dat longanimity of physionomities, I tink will scratch your backs, an' be dam'd to you, or put in black hole, 'pon honour, by George! dey will! So look out, you fellows. 'Tention! Shoulder armmes! Now, see you make present proper to Mr. Drake.'

Leaving the Don and his company to be inspected, I shall follow Mr. Wharton to his pretty house, where he was expected anxiously. Evening was closing in as the gentlemen, after their usual stroll on the Mall by the riverside, went on to the gate, where a native soldier stood on guard, the barrel of his bright matchlock glinting in the setting sun as it shone across the broad river in a rich yellow light, flooding the air with golden radiance, and resting upon the vanes of the ships, the gilt pinnacles of Hindu temples in glowing sparkles; while, on the cavalier of the Fort, the old British flag clung heavily to the staff. As the sun dipped behind the trees on the western bank, a puff of smoke from a bastion was followed by the sharp report of a gun, and the fort-flag and the ensigns of the ships were hauled down, as the drums and fifes in the Fort played off the retreat.

It was too hot to stroll farther, and Mr. Wharton was weary with his work of that day. As his wife came forward, he said, 'I must have some rest, Julia: Smithson will tell you all about it; my head aches, darling, and I will lie down till supper is ready; sit outside—there will be a breeze from the river by-and-by, and it will be cooler.' All that happened in the council was generally known to Ralph Smithson. He told Mrs. Wharton as much of it as he could without causing her extreme alarm, and after that they were silent.

It was impossible for each not to be busy with their own thoughts; it was equally impossible to shut out the conviction of danger. There were those among the reckless who met it with defiance, or sought temporary oblivion in strong drink; and there were others, too, who looked upon the crisis with a higher fortitude and resignation.

'And there is no hope of bringing the Subah to terms, Mr. Smithson? Has everything been tried?' asked the lady, at length.

'I believe so,' was the reply. 'I am too young in rank to be admitted to the council; but Mr. Wharton told me as we walked from the Fort that he feared the Subah was implacable. There are a thousand reports, madam, flying about; but what I have heard from good authority—in fact, from Omichund, whom they have detained in the Fort—is, that the Nawab has a new favourite, and she urges him on to the sack of our poor Fort. This doth not appear openly, but all the people seem to know it, and these native bankers have always good intelligence. I have little hope, madam, if there is such an influence at work, that we can counteract it.'

CHAPTER V

PERRIN'S REDOUBT

1. The Attack

A FEW, very few days more, and it was evident that outlying houses could not be maintained, and they were abandoned one by one with sad hearts. The military

officers of the settlement held daily consultations, and to the best of their judgment posts were arranged with a few guns on each, which, though they might afford means of a temporary check to the Subah's forces, were of too slight a nature to maintain defence against the odds they would have to meet when the real attack came. There was no news of any halt, even for refreshment, of the native forces. Day after day they were reported a march nearer; and this unusual vigour in the Nawab's proceedings presented a strange and alarming contrast to the usual marching of native armies. At the rate at which progress was reported, the enemy must reach Calcutta on the 17th or 18th of June at furthest; but on the 16th, about noon, there was no longer any doubt, for the drums and horns of the native forces were heard distinctly to the northward, as well as a few cannon-shots, which might be signals; and those posted in a redoubt called Perrin's, which commanded the northern entrance road to Calcutta, saw the first masses of cavalry debouch from among the heavy groves of trees which had concealed them, and for a moment halt irresolutely, while some of the foremost pointed to the British Fort.

There were a few English soldiers and sailors in that slight entrenchment; a few Portuguese and English artillerymen, and some native soldiers with matchlocks. Ralph Smithson was not in the military service, but he had volunteered to do his best, as did most of the others; and as that redoubt was the post of honour for the present, he had asked to serve there, and his companionship was gladly accepted by the officer in command of it. At anchor in the river, within musket-shot of the shore, was one of the Indiamen, the *Prince George*, the fire of whose guns would protect the flank of the post, and prevent its being turned. The earthwork was slight, but it was sufficient for protection and defence; and those who now garrisoned it had stout hearts. The day was insufferably hot, and light fleecy clouds sailed hither and thither in the upper air, dispersing, gathering and changing perpetually, but without affording any shade. There had been no rain as yet, and that day the sun had blazed with a sweltering heat, from which even the

natives shrank, as, with their heads tied up in heavy cloths, they crouched under the shade of the rampart, or clustered under that of a tree which overshadowed the redoubt, and spoke in low tones among themselves. Thus, from early morning till past noon, the advance of the enemy had been patiently awaited.

'The Moors ! there they are !' exclaimed a burly sailor, who, with several others, had been lounging over the parapet. 'Gentlemen, the enemy !'

The officers, too, had been lounging on the grass, in a temporary shed, and under what other shade they could find—chatting with each other, as men will do, cheerfully and gaily, when danger is imminent ; and they started to their feet and hurried to their posts. The guns were already loaded with grape and round-shot, and matches were lighted.

'Steady, men !' cried the captain cheerily ; 'no firing without orders. Our shot must not be the first, the President says. Let's see what those fellows are going to do before we fire.'

The horsemen had halted, and some could be seen unslinging their matchlocks, while others careered about, wheeling and turning their horses, while their naked swords flashed brightly in the sun.

'Very pretty, Mr. Smithson, is it not ? I should not mind sending a round-shot among these rascals if they'd only fire,' said Captain Brown, who commanded.

But there was a long pause, till a party of footmen, with a green standard and a small drum beaten quickly by a drummer, arrived, and took post under some trees near the horsemen. Something more was evidently expected. Nor had they to wait long. Presently the heads of several elephants were seen over the bushes, and then a drove of white bullocks, dragging a gun which was pushed on by the elephants.

'That means mischief, Smithson,' said a companion ; 'we shall hear its bark by-and-by. What a fool Brown is to wait ! damme ! I'd have a shot into it before they could unlimber.'

'Are you ready with that gun, Mr. Scott ?' cried the captain to an officer of the *Prince George*, who was on

duty there with two boats' crews ; ' cover that gun there, but don't fire till you get the word.'

' I am laying her myself, sir,' was the reply, ' and I'll watch your signal, never fear. That's a small piece, and they won't like the long nine when it gets among them, I think, my lads. Steady now, and slew to the right, Jacobs. That's it—look out ! they've lighted their match !'

There was a puff of smoke and a dull report in the heavy, heated air, and a shot passed high over the redoubt, roaring as it went.

' God save King George ! Hurray !' cried the captain, waving his hat ; ' Three cheers, men !' and they were heartily given, while the officer at the gun touched his hat. ' She's ready, sir,' he said, ' and I can see their gun now.'

' Fire, then, Mr. Scott, in the King's name !' and as he spoke Captain Brown saw the aim had been perfect. Splinters of the weak native gun-carriage flew about, and the gun itself seemed to subside into a heap on the ground. ' Now, the other, Mr. Scott ! That's capital, by George !' he exclaimed. ' I suspect they don't like cannister, gentlemen. Look !'

Fifty heads were above the rampart looking anxiously at the scene before them. Before the round-shot had been fired, a crowd of the native soldiery had collected about their gun, and into this mass the cannister of the nine-pounder descended with terrible effect, and a dozen or more men lay prostrate, some writhing, others still in death.

' Let's dash among them,' cried Ralph Smithson, waving his cutlass. ' Now's our time, sir.'

' Not yet, Mr. Smithson—not yet,' said the captain calmly. ' For heaven's sake, sir, be cool. We'll do our best, but we can't risk this post.'

He was right : the force of the attack had not yet come, for in a few minutes more they saw several other guns dragged into position, and prepared for action.

' By George ! there's a woman among them !' cried the captain, who was looking through a ship's-glass. ' What can she be doing there ? Don't throw away a shot, Mr. Scott, and wait for my word. She's there—there on that elephant with the silk howdah. Look out !'

The next discharges from the native guns were no better aimed than the first. The shot sang harmlessly over the English fort, and was replied to by so sharp a fire from the two guns, that the adverse artillery was dragged back among the bushes, while the place they had stood on was pretty thickly covered by the dead.

'A little nearer, and we'd have done for more of the d—d fellows,' said the naval officer, wiping the sweat and powder from his face. 'It's too far for the grape, Captain Brown.'

'Wait,' was the reply. 'I see a body of new people forming in a mass behind the trees. Steady, men! Here they come, by George! If the ship only sees them!'

As he spoke, a mass, rather than a column of footmen, with drawn sabres glittering in the sun, and broad black shields across their bodies, advanced at a run; a man bearing a green standard, and another beating a small drum, preceding them.

'Let them come on, Mr. Scott—nearer, nearer!' cried the captain, who was standing bareheaded. 'Now!'

The guns were fired almost simultaneously, and within perfect range this time, for the grape mowed lines through the mass, but did not stop it. At the same moment, a broadside from the ship took the column in flank, and did more havoc. This had not been foreseen by the enemy; and after an unsteady pause they broke and fled, a volley from the English muskets following them. Again Ralph Smithson and some of the men would have pursued, but were kept back.

'We have not done with them yet, I think,' said Captain Brown. 'They think they'll carry this post; but, by George! gentlemen, if you're all of my mind, they'll only get to Calcutta by this road over our bodies. Steady, men! and wait; when it's time I'll lead you. Does that satisfy you?'

2. Ralph is Wounded

The enemy were now more careful, and shifted their position more to the left, while a heavier column of attack was being formed; and a battery of rockets was opened upon the post, which, however, did no great

harm. Every now and then plunging shots from the ship swept through the trees, but did not stop their advancing preparations.

'She's there again, sir,' cried Ralph Smithson, who had borrowed the glass. 'I see her plainly—a fair red-checked girl, richly dressed. What can she be? There's no English woman among them surely?'

No, it was no English woman; but the Afghan girl Sozun, who, unable to contain her excitement, had been in the front on an elephant when the unlooked-for obstacle in the road appeared. It was she who was appealing to the Rohillas of the Nawab's force to prove themselves men—to bring her the heads of the English Kaffirs, promising a shield full of rupees for every one. She was speaking to them in her own fierce Pushtoo, and reminding them of home, and what would be said there, as the English captain was reminding his men too, of dear old England.

So an hour or more passed, and a sputtering fire of matchlocks was kept up from the brushwood and hedges in front, which was galling, because they had a longer range than the clumsy English musket, and by it a few men were wounded and four killed.

'Ye'll be frae the North, surr, a'm thinkin'?' said a tall seaman, with greyish hair and a weather-beaten face, who belonged to the *Prince George*, touching his hat to Ralph Smithson. 'A've heerd the burr a bit, surr, frae ye, and it's aye like music to mey.'

'I am,' he replied. 'Why do you ask?' The North! ah, dear old Melcepeth! What a flood of recollections flashed through Ralph's mind at the simple question!

'Weel, surr, a' made bow'd t' speak t' ye, fur there's na tellin' wha'll be alive an' wha'll be deed the day; but if anything happens to mey, ye ken, a'd like to think what a' have wad be sent hame to my folk, surr. A'm John Drever, surr, frae Berwick, an' a countryman—'

'Look out, Mr. Scott!' was the captain's cry again. 'By George! a gallant set of fellows they are! Ready there with the guns!'

'I'll see to it,' cried Ralph to the seaman. 'There's no time now for talking.'

Little time indeed ; for it was a heavy column that was advancing—perhaps a thousand men. The cries and shouts of the first party were changed for a rough chorus of some mountain war-song ; the faces of those that came on were as fair as the English faces in the redoubt, and they wore a sort of uniform dress of blue cotton.

‘ Fire ! ’ cried Captain Brown, standing on the parapet, while balls whistled round him like hail.

The aim was the same, the result was the same : a lane of maimed and wounded ; but the fair-faced men’s song did not cease, and the column surged on with increased speed. It was well that the commander of the *Prince George* had been watching carefully what was going on. With springs on the cables, he had warped the ship nearer to the shore, and so that her broadside commanded the green space before the redoubt, and at this moment a full broadside of grape and round shot struck the Rohilla column on its flank, while Mr. Scott’s guns again vomited their deadly contents almost in their faces.

About fifty of the enemy still dashed on, and attempted to scale the breastwork, but were met by the English boarding-pikes and bayonets, and fiercely thrust back. They were all of that column which came to close quarters ; the rest turned and fled, and Captain Brown, with a ringing cheer, leaped from the parapet, followed by Smithson and fifty others, in hot pursuit.

Ralph Smithson’s powerful arm told well in the hand-to-hand *melée* which followed, and it was not a bloodless one. First in the pursuit, he had soon overtaken the hindmost of the retreating foes, and dashed among them with all the energy and passion of his race—the Darnell blood was fairly up, and he felt, for the first time, the uncontrollable excitement of actual battle. It might have fared ill with him, however, that day but for Drever the sailor, who was close at his heels.

‘ Hae a care, surr,’ cried the man, striking down a thick-bearded fellow with his cutlass—‘ ha’e a care. Three to ane. D—n ye for cowards ! ’

Three men had turned, and with all their force attacked Smithson ; but it was for a moment only, as he parried the cuts made at him and fell back, for the seaman

had rushed in, and others followed, and there was soon an end to the encounter.

'You're wounded, surr,' cried the seaman. 'A' hope it's no bad, an' a've jist gotten a clink mysel'.'

Ralph Smithson had not felt the cut in his excitement : but there was a slash through his coat on the left arm, and his blood was flowing freely. It was not the first time he had seen it. Then he was sick to death, lying in a London street—now, had it not been that Captain Brown ordered them back, he would have gone on with the pursuit, little heeding his wound, perhaps beyond the bounds of prudence.

So they all returned to the redoubt, and shook hands over the affair, as stout Englishmen should do. There were a few wounds among the party hastily tied up, and four gone to their rest who could be ill spared ; and with a can of grog all round, they waited for what should come next ; but the 'Moors' had had enough. There was an attempt made to form up more men, but a shot or two dispersed them, and presently the Englishmen heard the deep drums of the Subah's forces beating far away to their right, the sound growing more and more distant among the trees ; and the fair face on the elephant was seen no more.

Nor were they long in suspense as to future plans, for a messenger arrived shortly afterwards with a written order for the post to withdraw to the Fort, the enemy having appeared in its vicinity, and every man being needed for its defence ; and as the evening was drawing in, the garrison of 'Perrin's Redoubt' was safe within the walls of Fort William, telling their tale to eager listeners, and receiving the congratulations they had so well earned.

CHAPTER VI

BESIEGED

1. The Nawab Sleeps

IN spite of his wound, which, though slight, was painful, and irritated by the great heat, Ralph Smithson had

fought through the whole of the 18th of June in a battery which, as belonging to the outer defences of the Fort, was one of the most important of those positions. He had never left this post night or day, so he had little idea what was doing in the Fort, and little inclination to be amidst the wrangling and confusion which prevailed. He had seen nothing of Mr. and Mrs. Wharton, who, he knew, were there now; and their house was a post which, as long as it could be maintained, strengthened the line of defences to the south-east. There had come a hurried note from Mr. Wharton, bidding him take care of himself; that his wife was safe; and they hoped, God willing, to see him again. But there were reports brought up to the post by men from the Factory—reliefs when they could be sent, or parties with supplies of ammunition—that matters looked bad there, and the gentlemen had decided upon retreat to the ships in case they were pressed by the enemy, and some women and children had even been sent on board.

There was no time, however, to think of such matters. Early on the 18th, as the mist which had been lying dank and chill on the low grounds rose under the gleams of the sun, it was easy to be seen that, though the previous day had been one of comparative quiet, the Nawab's officers had not been idle. On every house from whose terraced roof part of the entrenched lines could be commanded, strong parties of matchlock-men had been posted during the night behind screens made of cotton bags, grain baskets, or such other contrivances for protection as could most readily be arranged; while in others, loopholes had been pierced with crowbars through the parapets of the terraces, and marksmen lying safely behind them could fire leisurely upon those who manned the guns at the posts, and pick off any who moved about or showed themselves at all so fast, that the officers in command were forced to keep their men under cover, and to await attack, rather than seek to anticipate it.

Nor was this confined to the outposts only. Many of these matchlock pickets commanded the Fort itself, outside as well as in; and though there was shelter enough for the garrison, the guns could not be worked except at

great disadvantage, and the losses everywhere were constant and severe. It was no part of the enemy's tactics to come to close quarters with the defenders of the outposts, else, during that day, the whole of the outer lines might have been stormed ; the result of one attack at the redoubt had been enough to prove the mettle of Englishmen. Now, beleaguered as it was, the whole of the English garrison had, it seemed, no chance of escape. It would be an affair of time only, that complete humiliation of the English which he had decreed ; and till they were brought bound before him, asking pardon humbly, Suraj-oo-Doulah's revenge would be incomplete.

From early morning, in an upper room of a good native house, from whence, though out of range of musketry, the progress of the conflict could be watched, the young Nawab had sat at an open window with little intermission till noon. It was remarked by the English that there was a sudden cessation of firing then for about two hours for which they could not account, and in regard to which there were many speculations. The enemy might be eating, or some other movement was being arranged ; perhaps a general charge on all the outlying positions. It was not so, however. The Nawab had kept up his attention as long as he could, but there was no perceptible progress ; and the puffs of smoke, and dull reports of cannon, varied by the sputtering rattle of matchlocks and muskets, became so monotonous, that he had directed the firing to cease while he rested, lay down on a bedding, and slept heavily.

But Sozun, who was by him, driving away the flies with a light fan of feathers, was not sleepy. She sat at the open window, still looking out on the plain, and on the Fort of the mysterious people of whom she had so often heard. There were their ships which had come over the ocean in voyages of many months, with their white awnings glistening in the sun, and the red English ensigns flying from their mizen-peaks. There were a few small posts on the plain, defying the whole Moslem army as the redoubt had done—where even her own countrymen had been beaten back, and her promises of shields full of rupees for every infidel head, had failed to

bring one. What were these Feringis who fought so boldly, and dared to defy the hosts before them? She could see only a few men in red coats and black caps moving about the outworks. She had watched more than one drop suddenly at a gun, as it was loaded and fired by a few, and a sharp storm of matchlock balls whistled about them, and sent them again under cover. Now, as the Nawab slept, and the silence was almost oppressive, she could see those in the nearest post (it was Ralph Smithson's) come out and look about them; peer over the parapet of their fascine battery, and look up to the houses from whence the matchlock firing had been incessant—wondering, no doubt, as well they might, why it had ceased. Well! she should see them nearer soon—those fair-haired ruddy Englishmen would all be captive! And their women? Were there any there among them, beautiful as houris—as angels of Paradise—as she had heard fairer than herself? What if he should see any and take them, and cast her out, or send her to the vaults below the palace, where there were others she knew of, like the Begum, who might never see the open light of heaven again? For this there was at least a remedy; and while she shuddered at a possible alternative, he who might occasion it lay in his heavy sleep prostrate before her, as he had lain often before. Oh for a free life! This was but that of a slave!—caressed and indulged, truly, but to an Afghan girl a very hateful one!

Hateful indeed! What had her own countrymen cried to her when she strove to urge them on to the attack two days before? 'Hide your face, shameless one. We need no courtesan to tell us what to do. Hide your face, and begone from among honourable soldiers. Was ever an Afghan woman like you, O daughter of shame!' Ah, yes! they would not heed her protestations, or her frantic, passionate cries. They bade her begone, and one had lifted his matchlock to his shoulder, as he swore a shocking oath in her own tongue, which had terrified the driver of her elephant, who had turned the noble beast and hurried her away. Had she forgotten this? What to her were the cries, the fawnings of adulation,

which attended her every movement abroad, from the servile courtiers and Bengalee officers whom she despised?

In many a fight worse than that had she ridden with her brave father, and had no terror of sharp swords or matchlock balls. What she saw now seemed but child's play to those fierce conflicts, and to the sweeping charges of the chivalry of Delhi, as they burst through the Afghan squadrons and left her father dying in her arms on the bloody field of Sirhind! Had he but lived, she would now have been a wife in some quiet nook of the glorious valleys of Istaliff. There might have been children at her knee, and the rough choruses of her people ringing in her ears, instead of a life of shame. 'Begone, O shameless one!' they had cried—'hide thy face from honest men!' And yet she might redeem the past. There were women in her country who, clad in coarse garments, went about singing the name of Allah, or in waste places ministered to the wants of faint and weary travellers—women who had changed their life of sin, to one of good works in the love of God and the Prophet—women who were honoured while they lived, and had shrines by lone waysides raised to their memories after death. If she lived—if she lived—this might be; but for the present there could be no change—she could not fly—she must endure. And these, and a thousand whirling thoughts, went through the girl's mind as her master slept.

'Is the Fort taken? are the Feringis here?' he cried at last, starting up from his sleep. 'I hear no firing. Sozun, thou hast been looking on—how is it? Have they surrendered?'

'Surrendered!' she repeated, bitterly. 'No, the English, they say, never surrender. My lord slept, and there could be no noise permitted—so they told me.'

'The fools!' he cried—'as if I could not sleep soundly with the roar of cannon in my ears! The fools! and they have lost hours. Ho! Ahmed! Nasir! tell them I am awake, and look on at the war.'

I think the Afghan girl, with shame lying deep at her heart, which her lord knew not of, would have gone

forth there and then to her own countrymen if she had dared, and humbled herself before them, asking them to let her share their fate. She had been sorely tempted to do this many a time since she had heard their cries of shame ; but she would have thus exposed them to fearful risk, and herself to destruction. Yet there was many a tale and legend she knew, in which women of her own mountains had cheered men on to victory with shrill cries, and had even led them sword in hand—which were sung round rude fireplaces when the snow fell, or at the house-mill in the early morning, when meal was ground for the day's cakes. Her lord was impatient for victory. If she died among her people, it would not be in shame ; and as the firing recommenced suddenly, and she saw the red-coated Englishmen, who had been lounging about or lying on the grass, start to their feet and hurry to their posts—the desire to be with her countrymen in the hottest of the fray became more and more uncontrollable.

2. Sozun joins her clansmen

'There is nothing done, Sozun,' cried the Nawab at length, as he rose and seated himself at the lattice, watching, as before, the interminable puffs of smoke, and listening to the patter of musketry. 'Not even thy people, who boast they are the Feringis' masters, dare to venture out sword in hand against those few feeble Kaffirs. I tell thee, girl, there are not a hundred able men among them. See, here is the list, sent me from their Fort this morning ; and yet no one dares—no one dares,' he cried loudly and bitterly, 'to go upon them.'

'I dare, my lord,' she said firmly, rising from her seat near the next window—'I dare ! Will my lord let me lead my people ?'

'They are cowards ! they would leave thee dead on yonder plain. My rose,' he returned, 'I could not spare thee. What tales have I not heard of Rohilla prowess and that their plan of war was to charge sword in hand up to guns and slay the gunners ! Look ! there are but two guns in yonder post, behind some faggots which a boy might jump over, and not twenty men to defend them.'

And there is Noor Khan with five hundred of thy people firing volleys of shot at them and killing none. Oh, shame, shame! they to call themselves men!’

‘It is true, my lord—most true. I have watched this all day, and now am ready. My lord must let me go to my people; a woman’s cry may shame them to victory. I am a soldier’s child. Oh, my lord, do not refuse this! If I die, who will mourn? What I can do will be but a poor return for all my lord’s kindness and love.’

The Nawab looked at her from head to foot with a strange puzzled expression. Such a request to come from a woman! What woman did he know—had ever known—that would dare to make it? Had ever such been before? There were a few dim Persian legends of woman’s bravery and devotion which he remembered, and did not the noble wife of Humayoon the Emperor share her husband’s battles and his camp life? Had not Chand Beebee of Ahmednugger fought on the breach of her own citadel hand to hand with the Mogul chivalry, and driven them back?

‘By Allah! Sozun, thou mayst be right,’ he exclaimed; ‘but would I exchange that Fort and all its wealth for thee?’

‘If so poor a thing as I,’ she said, ‘could win it for thee, my lord, and die on the rampart yonder, my death would be welcome. My people would then sing of me in the old home, that she who had lived in dishonour had redeemed herself, and was slain in fight. My lord, my lord! if thou hadst only heard their words of reproach, which still ring in my ears, which haunt me night and day—night and day—for the memory of which I cannot sleep—thou wouldst let me go, else—I shall die in my shame. If thou wilt, I may do this. If I win that place for thee, Sozun will be a thousand times dearer—if I die, a thousand, tairer than I, are to be bought as thou needst them. Let me go! It is my destiny—thine and mine are the same. Day by day I have had the book of the stars read, since that Derwesh told it to thee, and the planets do not change. The star of my lord’s victory is shining above his head and over mine. My lord, I beseech thee, let me go.’

The young man seemed to catch up some of the enthusiasm of his beautiful slave, and he clapped his hands, and cried to the attendants, who answered. 'Let Noor Khan be called,' he said.

Noor Khan was the commander of the Afghans in the Nawab's army. He was in a house hard by, directing a heavy matchlock fire upon the redoubt in which Ralph Smithson was posted, and admiring, with a grim satisfaction, the obdurate tenacity with which the few Englishmen left there were now serving their guns, now firing from their heavy muskets, when the Nawab's messenger reached him, and he was soon in the presence.

'He is as my father,' Sozun had said to the Nawab, 'and I will not withdraw.'

'Hear what the lady has to say to thee, Noor Khan,' he said, 'and be kind to her. If it is to be, it is to be.'

The Afghan looked grimly at the richly-dressed girl before him, and said, in the broken patois of the country he knew:

'Men who look on the like of these are but zenana soldiers, my lord. Pardon me; it is shameful!'

'She is of thy country, Noor Khan.'

'She had better have died on the field of Sirhind,' said the man, 'where her father died, than live thus. I know her. If we dared, we would put her to death, as we do such in our country.'

'Do not speak, my lord,' cried the girl, her breast heaving. 'Let me—he will not refuse me.' And then, in a passionate flood of her own native tongue, she told her shame; her desire of death in dishonour, or life in honour; and begged, as she cast herself before the old soldier, that her prayer might not be rejected.

'Art thou content, O my king?' said Noor Khan, when he had heard all. 'If she lives, I will take her inside yonder fort to-morrow; if she dies she will be at rest, and it will be well—she will have redeemed her shame.'

I do not profess to say that the young Bengal nobleman at all understood or appreciated the wild sense of honour which the girl had inherited from her race. But he knew that Sozun, having once formed the determi-

nation, would not cease to beseech or taunt him. Perhaps—I will not avouch it—he was weary already of the wild Afghan girl whom no menace could terrify, and at whose hands, if he provoked her, he was as likely to meet death as she at his. He had been accustomed to other tempers—to women whom he could kick, or strike, or abuse, or insult at his pleasure. No doubt she was a restraint upon him, which he had never known before, and of which he was often impatient. It was only the girl's extraordinary beauty, and the fascination which she exerted upon him, that had held him faithful, or tolerant of her so long. Above all, to his superstitious mind there seemed to have entered a conviction that his destiny was in truth linked with hers; and that as she had brought him good fortune, it would continue.

'She is my pledge with thee, Khan,' he replied, 'and my honour is in thy hands. See what trust I place in thee! Thou art not the Noor Khan I know, if one of these Kaffirs escape thee.'

As he spoke, he had pointed towards the plain, and an exclamation of surprise escaped him. 'What are they doing?' he cried.

Noor Khan looked out upon the plain, over which the last rays of the sun before it set were streaming, upon a few parties of English soldiers here and there dragging a gun; carrying dead and wounded in blankets; some hobbling along weary and faint, holding by a comrade's shoulder; while others, covering their retreat, fired from time to time in answer to the shot which fell thicker and faster around them. All this was quite visible to those who looked on from that window—the green plain, the red coats on it, the small sad processions, and the little puffs of smoke from the muskets and matchlocks, fired as if by children in play. Beyond, the old Fort, and the vessels behind it; the evening breeze now and then floated out the English flag, which was flying there in defiance of the hosts which beleaguered it, and flights of great storks and crows were going to their roosting places.

'Too late!' cried Noor Khan. 'While I have been prating here, they have escaped me. My lord, let me

go ! If thou art coming, girl, be quick ; but not as thou art,' and he turned to where she had been standing.

Sozun, however, had quitted the room ; but as the old soldier was leading his men into the battery which Ralph Smithson had just left, a boyish figure, dressed in the blue tunic of his people, lightly armed, and with a rich handkerchief tied round the turban and mouth—overtook him, and, touching his arm, made a respectful salute ; then dropping beside him, took up the hoarse war-chorus which the men were singing, as they went on at a swinging trot. Ah ! it was like the dear old time when she was by her father ; and the girl's heart bounded within her with a sense of freedom and exultation to which she had long been a stranger. There and then, had they gone across that green plain into the mouths of the English cannon, Sozun would have led them in a delirium of excitement which she could not repress—as she leaped high to the burden of the rude war-song, and waved her sword and clashed her shield with her countrymen. But for the present the Afghans' advance was soon checked, and night fell upon the scene of conflict.

CHAPTER VII

FOREBODINGS

JUST then Ralph Smithson was entering the gate of Fort William with his men, weary, faint, and sick at heart, as well from his painful wound and hard day's fighting in the sun, as from the order to retreat, and to leave spiked the heavy gun, which could not be carried away. The dead, however, had been brought, and the wounded, and such ammunition as remained. The enemy had only got one gun, spiked, and that would at least be useless. Instead of finding an orderly garrison, and the usually grave quiet of the Fort, his ears were assailed with a clamour, and his eyes fell upon a scene of confusion, which he little expected there. An order had already been given for the women to be sent on board ship, and the boats lying at the landing-place were

taking in cargoes of trunks and boxes, and terrified weeping women and children. In place of an embarkation with proper order, every one was clamouring for places as though all chance of escape was already cut off. Shrillest were the cries of the Portuguese women and children, which mingled with the hoarse oaths of English seamen and native boatmen; and it was in vain that some of the officers appeared to be endeavouring to persuade the terror-stricken people that the enemy were still far from the gates. Several boatloads of helpless persons had already been upset from the crowding in them, and the people rescued with difficulty from the stream—nay, some had even been swept away; but this did not deter the rest, and it was only when the last boatload had gone, and the water-gate was shut, that, for the night at least, confusion was stayed.

Sick, then, with heat and pain, and faint with hunger, as he might well be, for a little hard ship-biscuit and some cold ship's beef had been his only food for two days, it was with a sense of comfort, and enjoyment of safety, that Ralph Smithson sat down that night to the only comfortable meal he had eaten for several days. A plentiful cool bath had refreshed him; the surgeon had dressed his wound with a cooling plaster; the kind thoughtfulness of Mr. Wharton and his native servant had provided him with a clean suit of clothes; and if any of my readers can remember having been in Ralph Smithson's straits in India, and to have undergone cleansing and refreshing as he had done, they will acknowledge with me that, during a meal so comfortable, all previous hardship would be forgotten. After his experience of an open post, a blazing sun over him by day, and chill dank dews by night, with a rain of shot perpetually pelting into it, and an enemy shouting defiance with every volley—the quiet of the Fort, the apparent security of the walls and gates, the heavy cannon on the bastions, and the cessation from firing on the part of the enemy as the evening closed in—conveyed an assurance to his mind which, though it raised his own spirits, did not apparently affect those about him, and the Factory hall was dull indeed that night.

Supper was one of the pleasantest of the Factory public meals, at all times ; a substantial hearty repast, wherein savoury curries, fresh mango, and bhilsa fish almost alive from the river, and Patna, or other up-country beef and mutton, smoked on the board ; and such tea from China, such coffee from Mocha or Java, as money could not purchase in England—with old Madeira and punch—were freely spread out at that liberal and hospitable board. Sometimes the English ladies of the Factory spent the evening there ; and not unfrequently there was a country-dance, or a minuet or cotillon, by way of wind-up among the younger folk, while the elders had their whist or picquet, or boston, or cribbage, and played pretty deeply too.

But that night the meal was eaten almost in silence, and quickly removed. The old khansaman, or butler, saw his English masters were in no good humour, and that it would be safe to get out of their way as speedily as possible ; and afterwards, instead of the pleasant card-parties, men gathered into knots and spoke little above their breath. There were some who, like Ralph Smithson, had had a post to defend, and who had much to tell of what had happened there. There were some still buoyant and defiant ; not boasting, as Englishmen seldom do among themselves, but saying to their own hearts, and perhaps asseverating it with an oath, that they'd fight the old Fort to the last shot before they'd give it up to the Subah, or any d—d Nabob in the country.

And there was a group gathered round an elderly native, sitting very much as if he were extremely uncomfortable in a chair, with his naked legs tucked up in it, and his knees projecting for want of room—a man with a thin bony face, and small twinkling eyes, who had a hooked nose, which projected over his short upper lip and thin moustache ; else close shaven, with a muslin skull-cap on his head, and a broad yellow mark of Hindu caste upon his forehead. This was Omichund, the great Hindu banker, who had been seized on suspicion of intrigue, and detained in the Fort, whom the President would not release ; and who, very friendly to his rich

English constituents himself, was professing his willingness to go and do what he could ; but at the same time expressing honestly his opinion that he feared that matters had gone too far for adjustment, except by unconditional submission.

Omichund well knew the young Nawab's implacable disposition. A thousand stories of it, which concerned natives alone, were current among them. Men—the public—for there is a native public there, as we ourselves know *now*—knew how the ears of the Derwesh had been cut off in open durbar, because he had spoken a word in favour of the English ; they knew that the Nawab had witnessed a special play in which Englishmen had been personated by the vilest of buffoons ; and the astute Hindu banker judged badly of the chances of the English after this. But he had been honourable ; he had paid every farthing of the heavy bills of exchange drawn upon him by the house of Juggut Seit, which were, in fact, the realizations of balances by the English Factory agent at Moorshedabad. He had done all this, but neither the Nawab's good mother, who had written to Omichund to do what he could for her English friends, nor Juggut Seit himself, powerful as he was, could turn the young Nawab from his purpose before he marched for Calcutta ; and it was not likely that he, Omichund, could do anything either, now he had arrived there. He had no need to go, he said—they need not send him away. The Nawab would not hurt him, and if the Fort were soon taken, his mediation might be of use.

If the Fort were taken ! Then it might be ; the old banker thought it might be. I think many others that night thought the same, because the ammunition had been inspected that day, and the disgraceful neglect of years had come to light. Men's hearts sank within them when they found the fuzes of bombs green and mouldy, and their contents wet with the damp of the magazine ; where also they found round-shot and grape hardly enough for three days' defence, and the powder so damp that it hissed long before it exploded. Under all these circumstances I do not marvel that the gentlemen of the Calcutta Factory spent an unpleasant evening ;

or that the minds of many, ordinarily cheerful, were filled with undefinable but miserable forebodings. It had not come home to those gentlemen yet, that Calcutta was unsafe; that the host thundering at their doors was in earnest. Such a thing had not happened since good old Job Charnock's time, and why should it be now? Here was only a weak sensual youth, whom anybody could turn round his finger—even his women and his eunuch—so they had been told, and so believed; but they forgot that, very often, these weak sensual youths are the strongest in obstinacy of profligate indulgence, and the hardest to be turned from their revengeful purposes.

CHAPTER VIII

THE EVE OF THE STORM

THE morning broke calm and beautiful, and the fresh breeze curled the great river, and blew out the red English flags defiantly before the Indian host. The Fort was still secure. There was no slight parapet, as at Cawnpore, with scores of yawning breaches; but a strong fort wall and shelter enough. There was no artillery used against it which could breach such a wall, and there were no bombshells to descend from above, and, bursting, scatter their horrible fragments far and wide. There were ships lying in the stream, on board of which most of the helpless women and children had already gone, and more were following. From them at least there would be no hindrance, no unmanning of brave hearts by contemplation of their sufferings; and yet we know by the sad record of history, and by the testimony of men who shared and survived that trial, that—it is hard to write it—there was panic, and its inevitable accompaniment, cowardice. 'Oh for Mr. Clive!' had been the cry of many a brave sorrowing heart, as boat-load after boatload of men and officers who, having the responsibility of the defence, were now terror stricken—abandoning the Fort. and flying shamefully to the ships.

'As soon,' writes one of the officers, 'as it was known that the Governor had left the Factory, the gate towards the river was immediately locked to prevent further desertion, and the general voice of the garrison called for Mr. Howell to take the charge of the defence upon him;' and, like a gallant Englishman as he was, he thenceforth did his best. There were no craven hearts in the Fort now, and there were no means of retreat; no boat, English or native, approached the doomed Fort. The English ships had dropped down the stream, but not to any distance; they could see among them the signals which Mr. Howell made for them to come up again to their anchorage, or to send boats for the garrison, but nothing stirred. As the tide turned, and the south wind blew gently from the sea, the garrison looked for a moment for one ship, one sloop, one pinnace, to come up and help them in their great need, but none came. I can believe this to have been no little aggravation of their misery—one which, amidst all their horrible varieties of suffering, the Cawnpore people were at least spared.

Those in Fort William were minded now to do their duty. They had still one hope, in the good ship *Prince George*, which lay above at the redoubt, and was ordered down. I believe that worthy Captain Hague, if he could, would have come down in the teeth of the enemy's shot; and as he weighed anchor, and sailed slowly under his topsails, there was many an eager eye looking to his manœuvres, and many a beating heart expecting him; and it must have been a sore pang to the brave fellow when, as we read, 'his ship was run on a shoal, either by the pilot's treachery or want of skill, and his good ship stuck fast, never to be moved again.' And so the last hope of the Fort garrison was blasted, and with many a heavy sigh, perhaps, but with clenched teeth and grim, defiant hearts, they set themselves—to do their duty.

And bravely, too, while they could, they did it, as history tells us, and as we can well believe. As the morning advanced, the Nawab's army closed rapidly round the Fort; the firing was heavy and constant, and

their approaches grew nearer and nearer. The church without the walls, the offices and warehouses, were carried one by one, while the defenders plied their musketry and cannon, and sheltered themselves as well as they could with parapets of cotton bales, and packages of stout Yorkshire broadcloths. Many were killed, and many were sorely hurt : but the evening came, and with it the rest which night gave—for the young Nawab slept, and it was death to disturb his slumbers.

All that day had the Afghan girl urged on her people, and well had they answered her call. She had seemed to them to bear a charmed life ; and superstition, as well as admiration of her bravery—it might have been called desperation—had already won for her the fame she had coveted. They had told her she would be sung of in the bazaars of Cabool, in the mountains of Istaliff, in the royal fort of Ghuzni. They—those wild, rude fellows—had bowed themselves before her, and touched reverently her hands and her feet. Where she led they would follow ; and among them, some of the burliest and bravest had formed themselves into a bodyguard, and placed their shields before her when the English balls came hottest. She had won her fame, even did she survive ; but I think the girl, in the fierce enthusiasm of her nature, rather longed for death, that she might live for ever in her people's memories.

So, too, fighting on the north-west bastion, all that day, were Ralph Smithson and Mr. Wharton. The few men that could be spared to them were weary and sick, some wounded too, and some fell occasionally ; but none left the post alive, and Julia Wharton, utterly refusing shelter within the buildings, shared the danger with them. Perhaps this one day, of all that siege, might be likened in some wise to the corresponding day of June in the Cawnpore entrenchment—and yet hardly. Great as was this peril and misery, there was still the hope that ships might come up, or that the garrison might be able to hold out. There was not the weariness of fruitless fighting which was falling on the others ; or that dull, leaden despair which contemplated grimly the few sacks of meal left, the empty provision-tins, and

the gaunt, sun-scorched faces of hollow-eyed women and children.

So one more night of rest from shot ensued, and yet less peace than before. Though the Nawab slept, and scarce a shot was fired, the enemy were not idle. As the night advanced, fires broke out in various houses beyond the walls. Mr. Wharton's had been safe up to this time, and they had watched, with a curious interest, the proceedings of the first body of native soldiers which took possession of it. Would it be destroyed? They were not long in doubt. As they sat there on the floor of the bastion, behind their cotton bales, eating what their native servants had been able to cook for them, and truly enjoying the repast more heartily perhaps than they had done many a costly dinner—a sudden glare fell upon the little group which told its own tale, and a fierce roaring and crackling of the dry thatch and bamboos quickly completed the ruin. So on, through the night—the marine-yard, with all its stores of timber, tar, and pitch—many houses—the church—burst one by one into flames, and lit up, with a frightful glare, the Fort, the white houses of Calcutta, the trees and the river, and rested far away on the masts and sails of the faithless English ships, which lay in safety. I do not think the thoughts of those who were in them could have been enviable that night, and, though death in all its most horrible forms was before them, those in the Fort were perhaps the happier.

I dare say many a last strange tale or wish was told by English soldiers, one to another, that night, in their last watch, while the glare of conflagration around them lighted up every nook and corner of the Fort, and vast forked tongues of flame darted to the sky, sending up showers of lighted embers and brilliant sparks; but I have no concern with them. It was impossible to sleep, and our friends sat together on the bastion, where Mr. Wharton and Ralph Smithson had to watch by turns until the morning. They had nothing new to tell—nothing new to request—all that was needed had been already arranged. In a quiet bivouac or picket, with the soft stars twinkling in a dewy sky, the men might have

told each other of their lives ; but this was not a time for such confidences. It signified very little, death seemed so near, what had passed beforehand, and their thoughts were involuntarily solemn ; and when Julia Wharton took from her pocket her small prayer-book, and began to read in her sweet voice, by the light of the glare beyond the walls, the Psalms for the evening of the nineteenth day of the month—many of the soldiers gathered round and listened bareheaded, and devoutly, to what I hope we all remember, while the girl's voice grew stronger as she proceeded—

‘ O sing unto the Lord a new song, for He hath done marvellous things. With His own right hand, and with His holy arm, hath He gotten us the victory.’

Ah yes ! Even in that sore strait they hoped and prayed for it, and reverently commended themselves to Him in whose hands the issues lay. And we know that all those in Cawnpore, daily and nightly, did the same.

CHAPTER IX

THE STORM, AND WHO SURVIVED IT

1. The Capture of the Fort

DAWN broke again, and the horrid stifling smell of burnt houses, the smoke of still blazing timber, had taken the place of the sweet dewy morning breath which ought to have been there. In place of trim garden-houses and the quiet of the English settlement, there were groups of smoking ruins and hosts of the native army, and roughly-constructed batteries, armed with cannon ready for the day's work. As the drums and fifes of the Portuguese musicians of the Fort beat off a quavering ‘*reveillé*,’ they were answered by defiant blasts of shrill native pipes and horns and the deep bass drums of the Nawab's nobut. The enemy were gathering quickly in every post, which became thick with turbaned heads ; and as daylight advanced, and the sun rose through the eastern mist and clouds, a fire more rapid and more deadly than any the English garrison had yet experienced, burst upon

them on every side—from cannon, from wall-pieces, and from matchlocks it poured thick and fast—and a heavy column of men were soon seen forming towards the north-west bastion, with the evident intention of storming it.

Snatching a few hasty mouthfuls of food such as they could get, Mr. Wharton and Ralph Smithson hurried to the point of danger, and, with such of their men as could be assembled there, strove to check the progress of a body of blue-coated assailants who, with an energy and bravery they had not yet seen attempted, charged up to the foot of the works and attempted to scale them. It was here that Ralph Smithson noticed a slight active figure foremost in every charge, shouting the war-cry of those people, urging them forward, and using passionate gestures of reproach and entreaty as time after time they were hurled back by discharges of grape and musketry, and by bayonets and boarding-pikes, wherever escalade was attempted. They marvelled who this could be, so young and so fair: for the ruddy features could be easily seen, and looked almost English.

‘Before he sleeps—before he sleeps at noon,’ had that Afghan girl cried to her countrymen, and so had led charge after charge in the name of Allah and the Prophet. But noon came, and the mysterious silence which they had always noticed at this hour fell again upon the native host, and once more there was to be temporary rest for all while the Nawab slept.

It was but a faint hope; but men in such straits will cling to any, while it was evident to all that another attack made with such resolution could not be withstood; so Mr. Holwell requested the banker Omichund again to write to the Nawab’s minister, and as the messenger with the letter was allowed to pass, there was hope for a while.

But not for long, though the cessation of firing had been of greater duration than usual. The letter had reached its destination; but with such a prize almost within his grasp, the Nawab was little likely to abandon his determination of revenge. Many a brave Moslem soldier had been shot down; the priest of the mosque, aided by

other priests, had been busy all the day preaching a holy war against the infidels, and the army burned to revenge those who had already fallen. Above all, Sozun had sent message after message to her lord to encourage his obstinacy of purpose, and his belief in her destiny now surpassed all other motives for persistence.

There was no answer, therefore ; and presently, as they watched the enemy, the preparations of several heavy storming parties could be easily seen, and the already exhausted garrison viewed them with a grim dismay. Before those thousands thirsting for their blood, without the possibility of defending or even watching the whole of the walls, there was no hope, and yet surrender was not yet spoken of among them. Even at that late hour, had the recreants in the ships below riding safely at their anchors—witnessing the strife, yet giving no aid—moved up a few vessels, the Fort might have been saved ; but Mr. Holwell, as he went to the south-east bastion to judge whether he were justified, under the circumstances, in prolonging the defence, saw no movement among them ; not a boat was lowered, nor was one near by which any message might be sent, while the enemy were crowding up the defences in numbers which he had no hope of resisting. It was then that, seizing a flag, he waved it as one of truce ; but the only reply was a volley of shot, and fiercer and hoarser cries from the men below. Then, on each other's shoulders—by ladders, clinging to pieces of broken walls—the Moslem soldiers gained the rampart, and, as he yielded his sword to a native officer, Mr. Holwell found himself a captive, while the few soldiers who still resisted died at their posts.

It was just before this that the Nawab's Rohillas, before whom ran and leaped the same youthful active figure which had been seen in the morning, came on in serried array, and at a rapid trot, holding their shields before their bodies to turn the English bullets, and reached the foot of the north-west bastion. There were fewer there now to receive them than before. Many of the militia—who, despite the Don's predictions, had fought well—now cowed and terrified, were sheltering

themselves below. A few English soldiers, Mr. Wharton, Ralph Smithson, and the Don prepared to do what men could ; and behind a screen of cotton bales Julia Wharton was loading muskets, and handing them to be fired. I do not think any of them spoke ; death seemed very near now, but amidst that fierce strife it was little thought of. As the Rohillas climbed up, hewing fiercely at pikes and bayonets with their broad sabres and sharp battle-axes, Ralph was at last face to face with the person he had so often watched ; that fair glowing face with its flashing eyes and a sword between its set teeth, the slight womanish hands clutching at the broken masonry, with a pile of dead beneath—was being raised up and covered with their shields. The Englishman's and the Afghan girl's eyes met for a moment as Ralph Smithson raised his cutlas for a blow which must have cloven her head to the teeth ; but he could not strike.

'It is a woman !' he cried, as he dropped his sword point. 'God help me, I cannot strike her !' The next moment he heard a sharp scream from Julia Wharton, and rushed to the spot. A glance told the story—her husband lay writhing in mortal pain. She was striving to raise his head, and as she heard his faint cry for water, to pour some into his mouth.

Ralph Smithson laid down his bloody weapon, useless now, for the Rohillas had crowded up the wall, and were spreading themselves on every side, as he reached his friends—all but Sozun and an old officer, who were arrested by the group before them.

'Strike him not !' she cried to some of her men, who had lifted their swords to cut down Smithson as he knelt over Mr. Wharton.

'He has killed our brethren. We have marked him these two days,' shouted some of them, savagely.

'He is mine !' she said. 'Away with ye to plunder !' and Smithson and Mrs. Wharton were saved.

Ralph heeded not the action, or thought of the blood-stained weapons lifted over him. There lay one he loved gasping out a last few trembling words, and amidst the din of strife he was listening with intense eagerness.

'I'm going . . . Julia—fast now. . . . It's very dark, darling. Where, where . . . are you? Where's Ralph? . . . Don't, don't forget . . . mother—mother. . . .'

A last great sob, a quick convulsion, and Henry Wharton, like many another, had gone to his rest, with his mother's name last on his lips, spoken as it had been in days of childhood long gone by. The convulsion left no painful trace—there was a sweet smile of triumph on his sallow wasted face, a flush of almost bright colour upon his cheek; but the blue eye was set in death, and a great majesty of expression was settling upon the strong handsome features.

'Oh, Ralph, he is not dead! Lift him up,' she said, faintly.

'He is gone, Julia—gone for ever to his rest.'

She threw herself upon the body with a passionate wailing cry. To have him snatched away in death, he, who had been spared through all previous danger. It was too quick a revulsion, and she had fainted.

'Raise her up, sir,' said Sozun, who, fascinated by the scene of grief, so natural—so terrible—had remained. 'Raise her up—I can protect her, and Afghans do not war against women or helpless men.'

'Art thou a woman?' said Ralph Smithson.

'No matter,' said the girl, 'what I am. Raise her up, and give her some water, else she will die.'

Between them, they raised Julia Wharton, and Sozun filled an earthen cup from a pitcher which stood there. 'Drink,' she said, as the Englishwoman's bosom heaved, and she sighed—'drink, and rouse thyself. He is dead—what canst thou do for him? Dost thou understand me?'

'I do,' said Ralph Smithson. 'Who art thou?'

'I told thee, Feringi, it does not matter; she is my care, and I can protect ye both. Take her up, and follow me. I hear the Nawab's procession. He is coming.'

2. *The Nawab Arrives*

The sun was setting, and a blaze of light shone upon the bastion, the blood-stained breastwork of cotton bales, and the white upturned face of him who lay at rest there.

Perhaps the Afghan girl remembered the white face of her dead father as the sun had gleamed upon it that evening on the field of Sirhind, for it was like an act of veneration, when she went, touched lightly the eyes and the lips of the dead, and then her own heart and forehead. 'The peace and blessing of God be upon him—he has died a soldier's death,' she said gently, and turned away. 'Come, sir, if thou canst carry her—she is safe nowhere but with me. I am a woman, and can protect her and thee. Art thou her brother? Oh, she is very beautiful!'

'I was his friend in life,' Ralph Smithson replied to the girl—'no more. She was his wife. Julia, we must go. I dare not leave you. Come; I will see to him afterwards. Come, this person will help us; she is a woman, and will save you from violence.'

'O Ralph,' cried the sobbing girl, falling upon his shoulder, 'I have none left but you—no one. O my God! no one but you; do not leave me now.'

So they descended the steps of the bastion, as the Nawab's palankeen was set down in the area of the Fort, and a concourse of people had crowded about it. 'He must not see her,' said the girl quickly; 'it will be her death, or worse. Can you not conceal her, till I can make her safe? Thou canst understand me?'

'Perfectly,' said Ralph, in good Hindustani. He had soon learned the colloquial dialect. 'Is there danger?'

'I tell you, sir,' she said, 'upon a woman's honour, and I swear to you by my dead father, if he sees her she will be seized for his zenana, and then—God help her!'

'Who art thou?' cried Smithson quickly.

'I am his slave and his mistress,' she replied; 'do as I bid ye, else she is lost.'

'She is right, Julia,' said Smithson; 'come here, it's the last place they'll seek you in—the black hole. It's dark there, and you will not be seen. Crouch down by the window, and I will come for you as soon as I can.'

'Yes, she will be safe there,' said Sozun. 'Keep quiet, lady, and for your life's sake do not show yourself.'

There was a group round the Nawab's palankeen, in which he was sitting speaking to Mr. Holwell, whom he was questioning as to the amount of treasure in the Factory. Men were loosing Mr. Holwell's hands which were tied, and he was telling the young prince that there was not much money in the treasury. Whatever there was should be looked after. There was no violence offered to Mr. Holwell; and others who were looking on augured well from that. The Afghan girl went and stood behind the Nawab's palankeen, and, except her countrymen, no one there knew her. The Nawab was inquiring who had climbed into the Fort first, and was holding in his hand a heavy gold necklace to bestow upon the person. Several soldiers had stepped forward, among them the officer to whom Mr. Holwell had given up his sword, and who appealed to that gentleman for corroboration of what he said.

'Nawab Sahib,' said Mr. Holwell, 'if I may speak, this man was the first beside me; but it was not till I saw the bastion beyond me full of Rohillas that I surrendered. One of them was the first.'

'Let me speak, Nawab Sahib,' said Ralph Smithson, stepping forward. 'The first upon my post was a mere youth; I could have slain him, but he looked so like a woman that I could not strike.'

'I am here, my lord,' whispered the girl, bending down to him, 'but take no notice of me for your honour's sake. Enough, that I have done what I needed.'

'Nay, thou hast earned it, darling,' whispered the young man, throwing the jewel about her neck, 'and wilt not refuse it; now begone, I will follow directly. Come hither Noor Khan,' he continued to the chief of the Rohillas—'well hast thou earned this, as well by thy bravery as,' he whispered, as he tied a gorgeous ornament of rubies and emeralds into the old Afghan's turban, 'by thy care of her; nor shall your men be forgotten.'

Sozun waited to see the decoration bestowed upon her countryman; and was satisfied, when the old officer's eyes met her own, that he was content now. She had redeemed much, but not all. Could she but save that

fair Englishwoman ! Ah, should he but see her ! It was hopeless to attempt it then, and till to-morrow they would be all safe ; and, giving a sign to one of the eunuchs, she stepped into a litter, and was carried rapidly away.

There was little more to be done that evening. The Nawab's heart was following his slave. How beautiful had she looked with the flush of victory on her face. Again and again the Fort was searched, and plunderers and Portuguese driven out. The Nawab's seal was put on the treasury ; ' he would come,' he said, ' and count the money in the morning.' Then guards were set, and there was quiet. The English gentlemen and soldiers, many of them wounded, were sitting about the courts in groups, speculating as to where they would be put for the night. That was the barrack square, close and hot enough ; and many, faint and weary, were lying down. The barrack-rooms were at least open and airy, and the platform where the men slept especially so. Perhaps they would get something to eat ; and the quiet, the relief from constant excitement of battle, had already sent some to sleep, and relieved the rest from all immediate apprehension.

Then, as the time for prayer came, the Nawab and all his people prepared for it, and carpets or scarfs were spread to kneel upon. There was no minaret ; but a muezzin ascended a terrace hard by, and began to chant the Azan—' Prayer is better than sleep, O ye faithful ! Prayer is better than sleep. God is victorious, God is victorious !'—and the cry, ' Ulla hu Akbar,' was taken up by a thousand hoarse voices. Thus, as the chronicle hath it, ' the Moors sang a great psalm for their victory, and the Nawab with them.' True, indeed, was the prophecy of the Derwesh, ' There would be victory.'

A few more directions as to the safe custody of the prisoners ; a few last orders to the governor nominated in regard to the treasury, that it was not to be opened till he came in the morning ; a few assurances to Mr. Holwell that he would be well taken care of ; and the English captives saw the Nawab's palankeen taken up, and attended by his courtiers and soldiery, set out for the town ; and they heard the matchlock shots and

the great drums which accompanied his progress, till the sound grew fainter and fainter with the distance, and so ceased. It was almost dark now, and men with torches ran hither and thither exploring the Fort, for a safe place into which to put the captives. At last one cried, 'There is the prison, it will hold them all.'

Ralph Smithson had taken Mrs. Wharton a jar of water, and she was drinking it eagerly and thankfully, and put it down carelessly by the window. 'It is so hot and close here,' she said, 'may I not come out, Ralph? they are all gone.'

'Not yet,' he replied. 'After the Nawab is gone I will seek a safe place for you,' and he went out again into the court. Some of his friends were sitting sadly, weary and sick with the day's fighting, and their losses; others were chatting together cheerfully. 'The Nawab had been kind, and to-morrow the ships would be up again.' 'If John Company had to pay a swinging ransom, what matter? he was rich enough.' Some of the soldiers, English and Dutch, had got to the arrack stores, and were roaring in drunken mirth, while others were trying to keep them quiet. Gradually all saw the soldiers of the Nawab close round them and drive them forward, while men stood at the prison door with torches to light them in. Ralph Smithson sprang forward to get Julia Wharton out of a place which he knew would not be fit for her, but he was too late. Those after him—some laughing, some shrieking in drunken madness, some protesting—came on in a dense mass, blocking up the doorway, while blows and pricks of swords and spears from behind urged on the rest. Then closer and closer the mass within pressed together and occupied all the standing room, till the last man was thrust in, and the door was shut and locked.

CHAPTER X

THE BLACK HOLE—SUNDAY NIGHT, JUNE 20, 1756

1. Suffering

It did not need many moments to reveal to the prisoners the frightful situation in which they had been placed. It

was indeed impossible for any one to move now, so closely was the mass wedged together ; and had it been standing in the open air, the weakest must have inevitably fallen and been trampled down to death. This was a room but eighteen feet square, and into it one hundred and forty-five people had been crammed. On three sides there was a dead wall of brick without any aperture, which indeed formed part of the Fort. In the fourth side, which opened to the barrack courtyard, were two windows which had iron bars, and by these, whatever air could reach the interior found entrance ; but what was it in comparison with the frightful need ? ‘ This is for life or death, Julia,’ whispered Ralph Smithson to the terrified woman, who had seen the throng troop by her with frantic cries and gestures. ‘ Kneel down, keep your face to the bars, I will stand over you while I have life and strength ! and I will yield to no other. Here, Mr. Howell, there is room by us ; come quick, and stay by me ; you are weak, and I am strong.’

‘ You are wounded, Mr. Smithson, and need a better place than I,’ replied the brave, generous man ; ‘ I shall do very well ; we have others to look to, and must not forsake them.’

There was little spoken, as men took the places in which they were to live or die that night.

‘ Eh, Captain Smithson ! ’ said a rough but weak voice behind him, ‘ ye’ll no forget Drrer, surr ; that’s the man fraa Berrik, ye ken ; a’m vara weak, surr, an’ if ye’ll let me pit ma heed a’tween yer legs, surr, a’ll no disturb ye, surr ; a’ll be vara patien’. Eh, captain, but it’s vara terrible a’ this ; the Lord be gude to uz.’

‘ Be quiet, then,’ said Ralph Smithson ; ‘ lie still, and take care of yourself—I cannot help you.’

‘ It hardly matters, surr, if a’ live or dee, it’s jist the Lorr’s will ; but if a’m deed in the mornin’, just send aale I ha’ aboot me to ma folk at Berrik ; there’s a wee bit goud I’ve gotten, an’—’

‘ Don’t talk,’ cried Ralph, sternly ; ‘ keep still, I’ll see to you, if we’re alive.’

Julia Wharton dared not speak. She knelt there between Ralph Smithson’s strong arms and knees, safe from

any crush from without, her white face pressed against the bars, breathing, but almost unconscious then. Every now and then she heard a cheering word from her protector ; and Mr. Holwell, and others standing and kneeling by her, tried to soothe her as best they could. Occasionally, when the pressure was heaviest, Ralph Smithson passed his arm round her waist, and held her up for a little to breathe more freely ; and once, when those without had brought a torch to the window, he saw her turn round her head and smile at him. I think, if she had dared to speak, it would have been some passionate avowal of gratitude for his care. But she was better silent.

There were men who, in that awful time, comported themselves with fortitude and resignation only known to Him to whom their spirits had gone before morning dawned ; and there were others as brave who were spared ; but among all that hideous mass of suffering, there was perhaps no calmer heart than Julia Wharton's. To live or to die, who could tell ? and she waited patiently for the issue. For a time the mass stood up quietly and patiently, and an order to strip off their upper garments was obeyed by most. Then they tried to sit down and get up at word of command ; but this soon became impossible, for many who sat down could rise no more, and fell under foot to die ; and the heat and stench were momentarily increasing, and becoming intolerable even to those in the foremost ranks. Who can tell of what passed further back ? Even those who came out alive the next morning, and have left their records for us to read, could only guess. To look back into that thick darkness was impossible, for the steam of men's bodies increased the gloom ; and when a torch was held up to the window by those outside, all that could be seen was a dim surging mass of naked men—English, Dutch, Portuguese, and natives—rising, falling, climbing on each other's slippery shoulders, only to drop between and be at once trodden to death.

Out of that horrible, seething mass came cries of 'Water, water ! open the door !' intermingled with prayers, wild and incoherent ravings, the shrieks of

drunken men, to whom their intoxication gave temporary energy—fearful oaths and curses in English and Dutch—in a Babel of languages—and among them the groans and sobs of the dying.

So passed one hour—two hours—and many were already dead, and more were dying. There was now greater space within, but existence was more difficult and impossible every moment. Some gave up the struggle at the windows for air, and wandered over the dead, lying down in corners; and, if they had sense or consciousness, breathing a last prayer, and so dying. Was there no pity among their guards? At first, under the heartless intoxication of victory, the native soldiers crowded round the windows, and looked through them by the light of torches, jeering in horrid exultation, and mocking the shrieks and turmoil within; while the heat, the glare, and the smoke and smell of burning oil aggravated the general suffering. Even these hard men could not long bear this sight, and turned from it with horrible loathing. Water! water!—would no one bring any to the dying, for the sake of the Lord Jesus and his mother Mary?

They brought it at last plentifully, and dashed it in the faces of those who clung to the bars, while hats were held out from inside, and filled from the cool waterskins, and so passed on behind. Some fainting wretches got a little, but most was spilled in the frightful struggles for it; and after a time came no more.

‘A thousand rupees to any one who will open the door and let us out,’ cried Mr. Holwell. ‘Ye all know me. I will answer with my life to the Nawab. We cannot escape—we will be quiet outside; and many are already dead. Oh! by your mothers, by your children, by the Prophet, do not look on at suffering like this, and deny us mercy!’

‘Let them fire on us, Mr. Holwell,’ shouted many a voice; ‘better we should be shot down and put out of our misery than endure this.’

Ah yes! it would have been better—an easier death than that horrible choking for lack of air; but no one fired.

'We dare not let you out,' said a native officer, who had been roused by the tumult, and who came to see what it was; 'but I will go and see what can be done.'

It was but a mockery of hope. Again and again the man sent his dread message that all the Feringis would be dead ere morning if they were not liberated; but to no purpose.

'Two thousand—anything—ten thousand!' again besought Mr. Holwell, Ralph Smithson, and others who could speak the native language. 'Go to the Nawab. He did not desire this; and ye will have to answer for it.'

'We dare not wake him, gentlemen,' said another superior officer, who had a compassionate face; 'we dare not indeed.'

2. *Sozun's Fears*

In a luxurious apartment, on the softest of cushions, the windows open to admit the night wind, Suraj-oo-Doulah slept tranquilly, and his lovely slave, Sozun, restless and wakeful, now sat leaning out of the lattice, now with stealthy step moved near her lord, and gently fanned him. All her excitement was gone; there was only one thought at her heart—that if the lovely English-woman were but seen, her reign was over. Yet she must be seen. Her lord would waken early, and the prisoners would be called before him. She must appear with the rest—and then?

Could nothing be done? It is a desperate resolution. Could she go? The clothes she had worn were in the next room. She could but attempt it, and die if she failed—

But even this was impossible. As she went out of her lord's chamber, and drew the curtain which separated it from a corridor without, she saw a group of the eunuchs sitting there awake, their swords drawn and resting on their knees, who looked up at her with their bleared, red eyes. They at least were watchful and faithful.

'What is it, lady?' said one, rising. 'It is but just midnight, and you are awake. Can we get anything, or call the women-servants?'

'Nothing, Nasir,' said the girl. 'My lord is resting quietly; but I am anxious, and could not sleep.'

'Anxious!' said the man, respectfully; 'we are all here—there is no fear. Go and rest yourself, lady.'

Should she tell him? He was one she trusted more than the others, and it was her only hope. If she could but get the Englishwoman into her own keeping, she would answer for the rest.

'Listen,' she said, beckoning him to her, and speaking in a low tone. 'There is an Englishwoman among those prisoners; take a palankeen and go for her. I would not have her escape in the morning—she is so beautiful. Go!—here is my lord's ring. Bring her here by the back way, and let me know when she arrives. She will need clothes and—and—no matter. Bring her hither, and to me.'

'On my head and eyes!' said the man, whispering, 'I will do it.' And so he left her.

Sozun returned to the window and looked out. A heavy sultry night it was, without a star visible, and a dull, oppressive weight seemed to hang in the air. All about was still; but over the plain before the Fort troops of jackals began to scream their midnight cry, and their unearthly howling seemed to be taken up from all sides by packs fighting over the dead. She drew the muslin scarf about her more closely, shuddered, and still watched. She saw torches moving over the plain, and a heavy litter borne rapidly along by men, and presently the torchlight gleamed upon the Fort wall and gate, and disappeared within it. Would she come? The girl's heart beat fast, as she strained her eyes to pierce the gloom of night; but there were no torches, nor any sign of movement over the black plain; and so she sat watching till the fresher air of morning warned her that day-break was nigh. Then she sadly gave up hope, and went and lay down beside him whom she had often dreaded, and never more than then.

I do not say that Ralph Smithson never moved from his first position. It was nearly impossible to maintain it at all times; and nothing but his strong bony frame and great muscular power enabled him to remain where he was, and to repel the surging masses of men which assailed him from behind, climbing on his shoulders,

and striving to drag his hands from the bars, to which he held with an almost iron grasp. Again and again he had fiercely and desperately struck down the poor wretches who thus assailed him. There was little pity between man and man that night. Often had he thought, if Julia Wharton died, he would go back among the crowd and die too. But she lived, and she was his—for that night at least. The poor seaman, Drever, too, held fast, and every now and then spoke cheerily.

‘Eh! dinna ye let go, Captin Smithson, else we’ll a’ be deed men. An’ the led dy, surr—my! but she’s a brave lassie—an’ the drooth’s sair. Ye’ll keep a brave heart, my led dy!’

‘Julia, do you hear what he says?—that brave fellow behind you? Keep a stout heart. If we die, we shall but follow him,’ said Smithson, cheerily.

‘I will, Ralph, I will. I do not fear so long as you are by. This water that you brought me so kindly, with God’s help is keeping me alive. I dip my handkerchief in it, and suck it. Will you have some?’

‘I will not take a drop, Julia. I have had plenty from the window, and Mr. Holwell says our shirt sleeves are the best. Mine are wet enough.’

‘How quiet they are!’ she said after a long silence; there are few speaking now behind us.’

Few indeed! He only dreaded that she might look back and see the ghastly heaps there, for a torch before them shed a lurid light into the room, and revealed all its horrors; but he did not allow her to turn her head. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘they are quiet, but do not speak—it will increase your thirst.’

‘If the led dy’d like some of the Psaalms, Captin Smithson? Mither used to sing them, and a’ll try if they’ll come till mey. It’s better than this dead silence.’

‘Don’t talk, Drever,’ cried Ralph Smithson, sternly. ‘You’ll die of thirst if you do.’

‘Deed, then, a’m red dy to dee, surr, if it’s the gude Lord’s will, an’ a’ll no talk nae mair. Only if I could mind a hymn or psalm. Listen! wha’s that?’

It was a hollow voice at the far end of the room, and it cried with a great moan—

'When the Lord turneth again the captivity of Sion, then were we like them that dream.'

The words had an awful unearthly sound as they came from among the heaps of dead, and silence fell upon all. After a pause, as if striving to recollect, it said again, in a louder and more hollow tone—

'Turn our captivity, O Lord, as the rivers in the south. . . . They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. . . . He that now goeth on his way weeping, and beareth forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him.'

Then there was a brief muttering of prayer, which died away into a hollow broken murmur, and again silence fell upon all. One more of that ghastly company had passed to his eternal rest; and there were some of the survivors who, like Ralph Smithson, never forgot those last solemn words of hope and trust, and felt even in that hour of horrible trial as though the peace of God were coming upon them.

CHAPTER XI

RELEASED

1. Julia's Fate

So they remained enduring, and speaking little now. Except an occasional moan, the sufferers were quiet. It was past midnight when a messenger came to the bars of the window.

'There's a woman among you!' cried a shrill voice. 'This is no place for her; she is to go to the Nawab's. Come out!'

Ralph Smithson instantly remembered the warning words of the Afghan girl; but Julia did not at first understand that the message brought regarded her.

'Let her go, Smithson,' said Mr. Holwell; 'she will be well cared for; we cannot save her. Mrs. Wharton, go—save your life—we shall all die before morning.'

'Oh no, no, no!' she cried—'oh no, no! Kill me here—I am ready to die; but do not send me away! It would

be horrible! Ralph! Mr. Smithson! I will not leave you—indeed I will not!’

She had struggled to her feet, and beheld, by the torchlight which streamed in, what Ralph had hitherto kept from her sight. Strong and resolute as she was, the sickening reality was more than she could bear, and she fainted.

‘She is dead,’ he said to the man. ‘You have killed her! Look!’

The eunuch shrugged his shoulders. ‘Open the door,’ he cried, ‘and let her out; she will recover in the air.’

But it could not be opened. The few chinks in it, and the openings underneath and beside the door-posts, had been so many air-holes, and men had fought for these, and died there in a heap; now no one could stir the door within or without.

Presently Mrs. Wharton revived. There was now water in plenty, and Ralph Smithson poured some into her mouth and upon her face. The soldiers without were trying to open the door, and did not perceive that the lady had rallied.

‘Keep close down, Julia,’ he whispered; ‘hide yourself if you can under me. Drever, look to the lady if you are able.’

‘I will, Ralph—I will do all you tell me,’ she said, faintly. ‘But do not give me to them—oh, promise you will not! I had better die than that. How many are dead, and yet my worthless life is spared!’

She said this in broken sentences, and he could not reply. His assuring arm round her waist, as he held her up with his still great strength, was proof enough that he would be true to her.

‘If she can’t be got out,’ said Nasir, to one of the native officers present, ‘she can’t run away. Perhaps she is dead; are there many dead? I must wait till dawn.’

‘All,’ replied the man, with a sigh—‘all except those round the windows. I wish it were daylight.’

There were more than he who wished for daylight. Of those at that window, Mr. Holwell among the rest, some left it frequently, and wandered back into the room

to die. Those who lived, struggled to their old places, and, with another terrible fight for air, lived on. But Ralph Smithson never quitted his hold on the bars. His left arm was much swelled, his wound had become exquisitely painful, and his right arm and hand, his legs and back, were bruised in every part. He was often faint and sick ; but still the true endurance of his Darnell blood, and his awakening hope in an Almighty Providence, kept him up amidst that ghastly company. He had had much communing with himself that night ; and felt, if he were spared, he might do better things hereafter, and be thankful if his life were saved.

At last the morning broke, and a Moslim priest, ascending the rampart above them, chanted the Azan, and its close—' Ulla hu Akbar ! Ulla hu Akbar ! '—God is victorious !—with more than usual solemnity and energy. Then the captives knew that their time had come either for deliverance or death. The fresher morning air had already revived some who could stand nearest the bars, and behind there was space enough now. Presently a message was brought from the Nawab that Mr. Holwell should come to him, and in no anxiety ; but the door could not be opened, nor was it till after a weary labour, by the already exhausted survivors, that its ghastly obstruction could be cleared away. Then twenty-two men and one woman, weak, pallid, utterly exhausted in mind and body, staggered forth into the open air, and sat down helplessly—some weeping, some sobbing hysterically, some praying and thanking God aloud, and others, not seeming to comprehend that they were in existence, tottering here and there, buffeted by the rough soldiers.

' You are to come to the Nawab, Holwell Sahib,' said a native officer he knew, who took him kindly by the arm and led him on—' you and the next to you in rank. Come, sirs, and fear not. The Nawab is sorry for all this, and will be kind to you.'

No time was allowed for parley. There were some litters ready, and the poor gentlemen bareheaded, and burning with the fever produced by the sudden reaction to life, were hurried away at once. No one seemed to care for the sick.

Ralph Smithson had supported Mrs. Wharton out of the prison, and had seated her in a chair on the shady side of the court. He thought Drever, the sailor, whom he had seen as the dead were dragged away from the door, had showed signs of life, and he returned to carry him out if he were alive. Just then the eunuch Nasir, who had remained on the watch, and had carefully scanned every figure as it passed out of the prison door, had the litter brought up, and ere she was aware of his purpose, Julia Wharton found herself lifted by several stout men into the palanquin; then the doors were shut to, and a cloth fastened round them, and, followed by Nasir and a guard of soldiers, it was borne forward at the utmost speed of the bearers.

Ralph Smithson, as he came forth carrying the almost insensible sailor, saw the litter and the soldiers turning out of the barrack-yard, but hardly noticed it further, and for the time the poor fellow he had brought out received all the care he could afford. But this was not needed when he was rapidly reviving and could sit up. Then Smithson turned to the place where he had left Julia Wharton, but she was gone. 'She will have gone to him,' he thought, and went towards the steps which led to the bastion where Mr. Wharton had died.

'You cannot pass up here, Sahib,' cried a sturdy native soldier, presenting his piece.

'Did a woman go up?' asked Smithson, hastily.

'A woman? No; there was one taken away in a palanquin by the eunuchs from the chair yonder—was that she whom you seek? They were the Nawab's people, and could not be stopped.'

2. *Ralph's Illness*

Ralph Smithson turned away, sick at heart. 'Would that she had died in my arms!' he said, bitterly. 'Would to God she had died rather than live a future life of shame! Was nothing possible to rescue her?'

Mr. Holwell and several other gentlemen had been taken away, and did not return. The sun was already high. Ralph felt very faint and weak, and sat down in hopeless exhaustion of mind and body. It was not that

he loved the woman whom he had protected through that fearful night, but the thought of her probable future fate was very shocking. Could nothing be done, even to ascertain it? Rousing himself again from the strange chill languor that seemed to be rapidly spreading over him, he addressed himself to a group of the Nawab's officers who were present, and by them his worst fears were confirmed. 'One of the Prince's most confidential eunuchs had come with special orders at night,' they said, 'and had just taken away the English lady; by this time she would be in the royal harem, and who dare follow her? No, they could give no help, no counsel. He was free to do as he pleased; but to approach the Nawab at all in his present humour, least of all in regard to Mrs. Wharton, would be madness.' He felt this to be true, and again sat down in despair, sick and giddy, as he had never felt before.

A friendly touch on his shoulder caused him to look up. It was the Don, who, with other Portuguese, as the Nawab entered the fort the evening before, had escaped to his home, little thinking how the night would be spent by his masters, or what he should find in the morning. The little Don's face was wet with tears, and he could scarce speak from convulsive sobbing.

'Come, Mr. Smithson,' said the little man, as Ralph looked up at him with a gaunt face and hollow eyes. 'Come, sir—my house. . . . You ver ill, sir—come. Will die if stay here. All go w'ere dey like now; and dey take away poor Mr. Holwell and some more gentlemen. Oh dear! Oh dear! What for not take you, sir? I tank Almighty benefactions for you, sir; an' I got all Honorable Company's books safe, sir—lock up; and here de key all safe, sir, 'pon my honor. Come, sir, no good stay here. Dese dam Moor bury poor Mr. Wharton with dead men, sir, in night. *Requiescat in pace*,' he continued, pausing and looking up reverently—'Amen; and I will get masses said, sir—by my Padre Sahib—Catolik Church, sir; never mind orthodoxation of comprehendings, Mr. Smithson—all quite good, sir, 'pon my honor! Come 'way, sir; I fritin to see debelopments of corpses out ot dat dam Black Hole. Let 'em go into big pit,

sir. Ugh! bah! Come 'way, Mr. Smithson, you very ill. I see you shiver, an' you gettin' fever. Dona Luisa glad to see you—'cuse me, but we's humblest people, sir, only truthfulness of Honorable Company servants—and—King George. You not trust me, Mr. Smithson? I got all books safe, by George!—no lie, sir, 'pon my honor! Come, sir, I insist—you gettin' worse every minit. If you lie down now you never get up. Here, Cassim, help up your master,' he continued, decisively, in Hindustani, to Ralph's native servant, who had just entered the court; and between them they dragged Smithson to his feet, and led him away.

In truth, the Don's long speech could hardly be followed by the young man. He felt he was growing worse every moment; and as it is recorded in history that many of the survivors of the Black Hole died of a putrid fever afterwards, I think he would have shared their fate, but for the skill and kind care of those who tended him. He could never remember perfectly how he got to Don Gomez's house, nor what befell him there; but when consciousness, accompanied by almost a child's weakness, returned to him, he found himself in the small bungalow which had been offered to him at first in the Don's garden—the cool wind playing over him and rustling in the trees above—unable to rise from his bed indeed; but, as the worthy Don and a Portuguese doctor informed him with thankful tears in their eyes, safe and convalescent. Then, too, he heard gradually that the Nawab had already left Calcutta, taking with him as prisoners Mr. Holwell and the other gentlemen; but of Mrs. Wharton's fate no traces had been discoverable.

CHAPTER XII

SOZUN'S PLOT

1. Sozun is Anxious

IN her terrible impatience, the interval between the despatch of the eunuch and the last sight of the little procession as it passed into the Fort gate, was hardly

endurable by Sôzun, as she sat at the window watching. How long would it take to secure the Englishwoman and bring her forth?—had she escaped?—was she with the rest of the prisoners, who were, she had heard, locked up for the night, or was she with other women, hiding where she could? If she could be brought away at night, she might be hidden and saved; but once seen by day, there was no hope—she was far too beautiful to escape *his* notice. And at the remembrance of the misery of the English girl's face, bending over her dead husband, the best portion of Sozun's nature was touched to the quick—an honourable wife, she thought, who had loved him who lay there white and still in death. Had they children? If so, where were they? She had seen none. Hidden away, perhaps, out of the battle. So, chasing each other, as it were, thoughts of the scene on the bastion, and of her warning to Ralph Smithson, came thick and fast into her mind; and still she watched.

Who was he? She had not forgotten the stern, excited face and flashing eyes which met hers as she was being lifted over the dead up to the bastion he was defending, nor her thrill of expected death as the young man's bloody sword was raised above her head for a moment and then dropped. He had said something in English—what was it? Did he then know her to be a woman? or was it the English girl's cry which had stayed his hand? How grand he had looked as her countrymen had crowded round him, and he held them at bay by the dead Englishman till she bade them begone. She had never seen one like him. Beside him, what was the miserable being lying there—tossing in an uneasy sleep—muttering words she could not distinguish? She crept near him to listen; but he was at rest again, and sleeping heavily, and having trimmed the lamp, she returned to the window.

She was weary with the day's work and the fierce excitement; but no sleep came to her heavy eyes. Though her limbs ached, she scarcely stretched them out to rest. Without she could see nothing but the dark plain, the river glimmering faintly beyond it, and the

mass of the Fort and ruined warehouses, from among which dull fires gleamed, and light wreaths of smoke from smouldering embers rose occasionally into the air. Far away to the west, lightning was flickering among the clouds on the horizon ; and she watched it vacantly, now brightly flashing, now glowing with a dull coppery gleam, and disappearing altogether. There was perfect stillness over all, except now and then the faint, distant cry of a sentinel, or the beat of a hollow-sounding drum and blast of a shrill horn, where a new watch was being set.

Still the eunuch did not return ; and to her perception the danger had much increased. What if the woman were dead ? Did Englishwomen, like other infidels she had heard tales of, sacrifice themselves to their husband's memory ? Had she escaped to the ships, and Nasir feared to return without her ? If she came, what was to be done ? Where could she be lodged in safety, away from the Nawab ? Would Nasir be faithful ? and if not—? She had no attendant on whom she could depend for aid. There were crowds about her, but they were the Nawab's creatures—not one of them would dare to brave his anger, with the memories of many a tortured, mutilated wretch vividly in their remembrance. No, there was no help there ; whatever was to be done she must do herself. The palankeen, whenever it did come, must be brought into the inner court of the house where they were staying. It was true she had told Nasir to await her orders, and he might be obedient ; but it was a fearful risk, nevertheless.

Then her memory went back to the young Englishman. She shut her eyes and thought of him—so beautiful and yet so terrible. She thought of him, too, as he might be—tender and gracious ; as she had seen him when he spoke to the woman, full of pity, with tears flowing from her eyes as he comforted her and led her away. Would she have gone like her ? Ah yes ! They said—even her own people said—he was a hero, and no one would have harmed him.

A strange watch indeed, and with stranger thoughts for company. Where had they not wandered in those

weary hours, back from childhood, from the deadly field of Sirhind, through a life of false triumph and of shame—down to this? Was it enough to have lived for? A life without a tie, a life without love such as she had dreamed of in spite of evil influences! Yet one of splendour and of power such as she had hardly dared to imagine! She could not retract now—she durst not. Among her people she had won honour, but her shame remained—could she leave that, hang grave-clothes about her neck, and go forth a humble devotee of God? It was the only alternative she knew of, but one she dared not attempt. Would the Nawab let her go? Never with life; to be detected in flight would be attended with mutilation or death. But she was yet secure; and as she turned to her lord's couch, memories of kindness, of many a fond caress, of the only love he had given to any one, came back upon her heart, and for the time softened it. 'He might wrong me, he might even strike me,' she said; 'but I could bear it: I could not leave him but for God's service, and I am not fit for that yet. So long as it may be my destiny I will live with him—or die, true even in death. See, he calls me, and I was in his thoughts as he in mine.'

2. *Troubled Dreams*

'Sozun, Sozun!' It was a moaning, plaintive cry in his sleep, and she went again to his side. 'Sozun! ah, girl, do not leave me! I have only you—only you,' and he stretched out his arms, while she saw by the dim lamp that his face was sorely troubled.

'It is some uneasy dream,' she thought; 'I had best wake him.' 'I am here, my lord,' she said, gently taking his hand; 'Sozun is here; why didst thou call? I have not left thee.'

The Nawab started up and pushed away her hand apparently in terror. 'Where am I?' he cried; 'that Derwesh! save me from him; oh save me, Sozun!' and as he hid his face in her lap, she felt that he trembled.

'My lord, my lord! Let me take the evil off thee: what was the dream?' she said, soothing him. 'There

was no Derwesh near thee—there is no one but me. I could not sleep, and was watching thee, my lord. It is but a dream—let it pass.’

‘His eyes, his eyes! Oh, Sozun! they gleamed at me, as they did once in life. That dream! Ah! girl, that would frighten thee—even thee. Yes, let it pass. Is there yet much of the night?’

‘I think not,’ she said; ‘the dawn is almost breaking. Wilt thou sleep again?’

‘No,’ he said, ‘not now. I should dream again of him, perhaps. Sit by me, and tell me of the fight.’

‘Thou hast won Calcutta,’ she said; ‘is not that enough? For no one yet dared to attack the Feringis but thee. Did not the Derwesh—did I not tell thee, thou wouldst be victorious?’

‘But for thee, my life, I should have lost it. Now, what my father dared not do, I have done. But for thee, I should have been like him, afraid of a few white faces and a few guns. Now these Feringis fear me, and, Inshalla! they shall do so hereafter. I promised thee the plunder of Calcutta Fort, and thou hast won it, girl; and while I dispose of these Feringis, who have so long defied me, thou canst go there and do thy will.’

‘Be as merciful, my lord,’ she said pleadingly, ‘as thou hast been victorious; they cannot hurt thee now. Be merciful, for Sozun’s sake.’

‘I will,’ he replied; ‘but the Priest thirsts for their blood, the blood of the Kafirs who deny the Prophet, and he hath inflamed men’s minds.’

‘The blood shed yesterday was enough surely to satisfy him, my Prince?’

‘I fear not, Sozun; but I will not yield. Ah! there is dawn, and the music begins. Get thee to sleep for a while—thou art weary, and thine eyes are heavy. I shall not see thee all day, my life; but in the evening thou shalt sing me to sleep;’ and he passed out of the chamber to his attendants.

It was like a reprieve to Sozun to hear this: she would then be alone, and there was a better chance of success than she had dared to hope for. Sleep was out of the question, for her faculties were more than ever excited.

Would the Englishwoman be brought ? When she came could she understand her, and if not, what should she do ? There were servants in Calcutta who spoke English—could one be sent for ? Ah ! why was she delayed ?

Sozun seated herself again at the window. The morning breeze blew fresh and cool then, driving before it the heavy mist which had rested on the river in that close sultry night, and she watched the sails of boats gliding to and fro on the river. People were thronging toward the Fort, and some of the burned buildings were still smoking. Presently she saw the Nawab's retinue assemble below, and it was shortly in motion towards his tents, which were pitched in the camp. No one moved from the Fort as yet ; but after a time some soldiers issued from the gate, then a few mean litters and men on foot, and she watched their progress to the camp ; presently, too, a royal palankeen—she well knew its scarlet cloth covering—and Nasir mounted on his piebald palfrey urging on the bearers behind.

' It is she—it is she ! ' the girl exclaimed, clasping her hands ; ' and he is true.' Ere many minutes had elapsed, footsteps were heard on the private stair which opened into an adjoining room, and she went to receive her strange visitor.

' She is here, lady,' said Nasir, who first entered ; ' but she has come out of the mouth of death, and is in sore plight. They all died last night but her and a few others—but she may be saved. Look ! '

It was indeed as he had said. Julia Wharton—clothes wet, torn, and dirty, her hair dishevelled, her face haggard, and her eyes swollen with weeping and misery—the lovely Englishwoman Sozun had seen the evening before, could hardly have been recognized. ' Thou art welcome, sister,' she said, as Julia Wharton, weeping and trembling with terror, sank down before her, and was raised with cheering words of genuine compassion. ' What can I do for thee ? Dost thou understand me ? ' But the lady could not reply ; in her terror and misery she was as one distraught.

' Some one must be brought who can speak her strange tongue. Canst thou get such a one, Nasir ? '

'I will try,' he said, 'but it is dangerous. What wilt thou do with her, lady? Is she for him?—thy gift to him?'

'No, no!' she returned fiercely, stamping her foot. 'Why do you ask?'

'I beg pardon,' replied the man humbly; 'I will seek for an ayah,' and he left them together.

As he passed out there was a woman sitting alone by the steps of the house, weeping bitterly. 'Who art thou?' he asked.

'I am Missy Baba's servant,' she said, 'and she has been taken here. Oh, sir, let me go to her; I have followed her.'

'How lucky,' thought the eunuch. 'Come with me,' he said; 'she is safe;' and they returned through the private court.

'Missy—oh, Missy Baba!' cried the faithful creature, as she entered the room, and cast herself at the feet of her mistress; 'come 'way—come my house; you no to stop here; dis no good place; come, I take you—come,' and she tried to drag Mrs. Wharton to her feet.

'Let her alone,' said Sozun; 'she hath hardly sense to hear thee. Peace! ye are with a friend; speak to her, for she doth not understand me, and tell her not to be afraid.'

CHAPTER XIII

JULIA'S CHANCE

1. *In Sozun's Power*

'Missy not know Anna?' cried the woman. 'Oh, look up, and no fear for any ting; dis lady kind lady, an' Anna come to help. Oh, Missis safe; and, I tank God, no dead in Black Hole.'

Julia Wharton's great blue eyes opened, and she looked up. It was the only act of consciousness she had evinced since her entrance. With whom was she? Who were the man and woman—that English girl in disguise, as she had thought Sozun? Where was she? She tried to speak, but all that Anna could understand was, 'Water.'

'Water—she wants water, lady,' said Anna, anxiously. 'Ah, lady, my mistress was in the prison all night, and hundreds died around her. She will be better presently ; pardon her.'

'And her husband was killed beside her,' added Sozun. 'I saw him lying dead on the bastion : would she had died too ! Art thou a Moslimin ?'

'Oh no !' cried the woman. 'I am a Christian, Portuguese, and her servant. They told me she was in the Nawab's palankeen, and I followed it.'

'It does not matter, if thou canst be faithful,' replied Sozun. 'Take of this water freely ; there are no distinctions in such grief. Drink, lady.'

'O Missy, drink some cool water, you will be better soon, and safe ; dis lady goot lady, but I was afraid at first,' said the servant.

'Who is she, and where am I ?' asked Julia Wharton, after an eager drink.

'Me not know,' replied Anna, 'but me here wit you, dat's 'nough. Now lie down, Missy—poor Missy—but will be well presently ;' and raising her mistress she supported her to a carpet which was spread near them ; while Sozun fetched pillows, which she arranged carefully under the poor aching head.

'Be quiet now, lady,' said Anna in a whisper ; 'she may sleep ;' and they sat down silently beside her.

Julia Wharton was weary, even to death she thought. Her senses were confused and stunned ; she could remember nothing but portions of the fearful night she had passed, and shut her eyes shuddering, as the cries and groans of the dying seemed to fill her ears.

'Ah, you not tremble so, Missy—me wit you ? Anna not go 'way now, never no more ;' and she took her mistress's head on her bosom, and put away the dishevelled hair, while Sozun chafed her hands. Presently they saw a faint colour come into the wan cheeks ; and as the girl grew calmer, tears welled from her eyes. 'Do not leave me, Anna,' she said softly ; 'They are all gone but you—all dead !—all dead !'

'Me never leave poor Missy Baba no more,' said the woman, herself bursting into tears—'never no more.'

Now, go to sleep, that's a dear lady, me watchin' by missis ;' and she began to sing a low crooning lullaby of the country, such as is sung to children. Gradually they saw the eyelids drooping more heavily, and the fair girl's countenance relax from the expression of terror ; and they sat and watched her silently. The frame was utterly worn out, and kind nature was applying the only remedy for its restoration.

' Couldst thou conceal her—hide her away ? ' asked Sozun, after a while in a low whisper. ' Dost thou wish to save her ? '

' From what ? ' answered the woman. ' You are kind, why should she fear ? She is not a man that the Nawab should desire her blood. Has he not destroyed them all ? '

' It is because she is a woman that I fear for her,' returned Sozun. ' It is because she is beautiful that I have had her brought to me. Who dare conceal her but me ? Were he to know of this, dost thou think my life or her honour would be safe ? Canst thou understand what I have dared—to—save her ? '

' Who art thou, lady ? ' asked the servant, tremblingly. ' His wife ? '

' Ah, no,' she said, ' I am not his wife : and if she remained he would hate me, and forsake me for her. Look ! her beauty is returning. Why did she not die ? '

True, it was returning, for her sleep was peaceful and refreshing. As they looked upon the girl, there was a soft smile upon her mouth ; the rosy lips were partly open, and disclosed the pearly teeth, and the cheek was flushed with the beautiful colour habitual to it, even in India.

' Look ! ' continued Sozun, ' is she not beautiful ? Such may be the houris of Paradise they tell of, but not women amongst us. Dost thou comprehend now what I fear ? '

The servant's mind was a poor one, blunted perhaps by service and a rough striving life ; but it was a woman's, and could comprehend jealousy and its accompanying dread and terror, which, in the fair face of Sozun, were fast increasing.

'I understand,' she replied; 'thou art not her enemy, lady?'

'If I were,' returned Sozun, 'I would take my lord by the hand and bring him to look on her. Even thus—as she lies, weary and faint—she is more lovely than he had ever dreamed of; and what would she be were she attired as I am? Ah, no—she or I—she or I: and I would save her.'

'An English woman would not be the wife of the Emperor of Delhi,' said the servant, proudly. 'Why do you fear for her?'

'I fear thou, too, art a fool,' returned Sozun, quickly. 'His wife! No, but worse; the slave of his honour, to be cast away to perish when he was weary of her. Dost thou not understand? If thou canst not, wilt thou make her do so?'

'Where could I take her?' said the woman, drearily, passing her hand across her eyes; 'who could now protect her? Even Don Gomez dare not, and the Nawab would hear of her, and hang him. Oh, lady, why was she brought at all?'

'That she might be saved,' was the reply. 'None but I could save her, or can save her. If thou hast any wits thou wilt not fail me. Think again; the Nawab will not stay many days—any hut, any cabin—what matter? If she once knows her own danger, she will save herself, or die. Does she fear death more than dishonour?'

'I cannot tell,' said the woman, despairingly. 'When she wakes we must tell her. There is one—yes, one—the Begum, who might—'

'I bless thee, O Allah Kureem! that there is hope. She would not refuse her?'

'No, I think not. I could take Missy there at night if you would give her clothes.'

'Surely, surely. Ya Allah, I vow thanksgivings to thee at every shrine. Yes, till night. Before then she shall be bathed and refreshed, she shall eat, and be strong. Oh that it were night! Till then—be thou but merciful, O Lord! See, the door there is fastened; no one can enter. I shall order water for the bath, which is beyond, and I shall tell them I bathe in private to-day.'

Yes, it will do,' continued the girl to herself, quickly ; 'there is no fear ; and when my food comes, she can eat of it with me. Fear not to be alone, I will soon rejoin thee.' Would Nasir be faithful? That was her only dread now.

He met her 'at the anteroom-door of the Nawab's chamber. 'I have been watching,' he said, 'and no one suspects as yet. But if he discover this lady, we must both die. Why didst thou risk it? Had I but known thy intention, I would not have gone for the woman—no, even for thee ; why not give the Feringi to him?'

'There is no fear,' she replied, with all the calmness she could command, but she well knew the truth of his word, and trembled—was it worth the risk after all? Might not she trust her lord, and send the English girl there and then into the street? Give her to him? Ah, no! The sharp old pang of jealousy once more shot through her heart, as she stood irresolute for a moment ; and she who had not feared death as the Englishman's sword quivered over her head, did not fear it now. 'She or I,' she muttered—'she or I.'

'As you will, lady,' continued the man ; 'what will be, will be. Thou hast not eaten yet?'

'Tell them to make the bath ready, and to send little Janum to me ; she will do what I need, Nasir. If there be danger, tell me of it, and keep watch.'

'It is too late,' said the man moodily to himself as he bowed and left her—'too late.'

2. *Julia Awakes.*

All day the house had been still, and Julia Wharton slept on her heavy sleep. When she woke, her eyes first fell upon Anna, who had never left her. A moment afterwards, as all the events of the night rushed upon her memory, she flung her arms round her servant in a paroxysm of terror. 'Come away,' she cried—'come away, Anna ; why do we stay here?'

'Ah Missy!' said the woman, 'where you go now? Got no house, no Fort, no nothin'; where you go, my darlin'? best to stay here till night, then go 'way to Begum Sahib ; she will keep you safe.'

Perhaps it was then only that her utter desolation was understood. Last night, even in the fearful death-prison, Ralph Smithson's stout arm was about her; and there were Mr. Holwell and other friends near; why was she not with them? 'Where are the gentlemen?' she asked.

'I tell by-and-by every ting. Missy now bathe and eat something, then will be more stronger. I get clean clothes, native clothes missis wear, cause nobody not find out missis.'

'Who was with me at first, Anna?' she continued. 'I think I saw some European woman disguised in native clothes; but, indeed, I was very confused.'

'Ah, she good lady dat! she send missis away to-night, den bad Nawab not get her.'

'The Nawab! then I am in his power,' she gasped. 'O Anna, I remember now how they seized me, and carried me here when I had fainted.'

'Lady will tell all when come; now be quiet an' wait. Me not dare go out, but missis get bath and eat; then get plenty strong, and night-time dey send away safe; missis understand?—safe to Begum Sahib.'

I do not think Julia Wharton could then comprehend the danger of her position. She thought some compassionate native lady might have protected her, and she understood that she must go out at night to be safe. She was no coward; and if there was ever a moment of her life in which all her presence of mind was needed it was this. It was clear to her that she was alone, and that none of her English friends were near; but those who lived through the night must be alive, and if she could get to the Begum she would soon find means to communicate with them. With this thought her spirit rose, and she prayed fervently for help.

'I will do what you wish,' she said; 'and oh, Anna! how can I repay what you are doing—what you have done for me?'

'Missis, never mind dat,' said the woman joyfully. 'I very glad to help my darlin' Missy Baba. Now we take off dem dirty clothes, an' make pretty Mussulman girl of my lady. Den rest quiet all day; and I pray

good Virgin Mary she keep you safe. Dere's no helpin w'at's been done neider. Dat's God's will, an' holy Virgin.'

Sozun was right. It would have been little use overwhelming an already scared and nearly unconscious woman with a prospect of imminent danger; but when she herself and Anna, aided by the little slave, had bathed the fair stranger, Sozun's exclamations at her beauty could hardly be restrained. When all the dishevelled hair had been combed out and braided; when, refreshed more than she could have thought possible, she was dressed in a plain suit of Sozun's travelling clothes—the metamorphosis from the haggard dragged woman who had been brought in the morning, to the lovely being who sat before her, blushing at the strange attire in which she found herself dressed, was more wonderful than Sozun could have imagined. She pressed her guest to eat, and Julia Wharton was strengthened by what she took. She had only one object now—to escape thence; and though it was no easy matter for Anna to interpret the rapid impetuous speech of the Afghan girl, Julia soon comprehended what she had to do, and the reason why it should be done.

CHAPTER XIV

HOPFLSS

1. Nasir's Vigilance

I QUESTION which of the two women was the bravest—the Afghan who had gone to battle in a fierce desire of winning back the honour among her people which her evil life had forfeited—or the English girl who, with a calm brow and now serene beauty, heard what her fate might be, and in the purity of her faith looked up to Him to whose protecting care she committed herself. Sozun had expected tears, wailings, helplessness—which might mar her project altogether, or increase the difficulty of its execution. Instead of this, she saw a girl, hardly older than herself, who had already endured horrors

such as she could not imagine—a stranger in a foreign land, far away from her people—undismayed, trusting in God, and prepared to do her best in whatever might follow. ‘Ah, yes!’ she thought, ‘such are the mothers of those men whom we have feared; such was the mother of him who spared me! What marvel if, hereafter, they be our conquerors!’

From time to time Sozun had anxiously sent for news of the Nawab and it promised well for the success of her enterprise that there were messages in reply from him that he was delayed—that he might be late—that it might even be night before he returned. The English gentlemen had to be examined as to their treasures; the agents of Juggut Seit, Omichund, and other bankers, as to the moneys lodged with them; the amount of advances made for purchases; and the stocks of goods in hand. Weary, unrefreshed, stunned by the calamity which had fallen on them, Mr. Holwell and his fellow-captives yet bore themselves stoutly that day; and the abuse and execrations of the Nawab, on his disappointment at not finding the treasure-hoards he had expected, were bravely endured. But I have no concern with them; nor can I follow them in their wretched captivity and distress afterwards, when they were taken up to Moorshedabad in an open boat, their bodies covered with boils and ulcers—the effect of the poisonous miasma of that horrible night in the prison—nor relate how at last they were released, and rejoined their countrymen in safety, after all their perils.

Nasir had not relaxed in his vigilance. In his heart he had disapproved of the child Janum having been admitted, yet he dared not cross the humour of the Nawab's favourite. He had now left his post, and had been able to lock up the door of the small court by which the Englishwoman had entered, and thus to prevent intrusion there; still it was almost impossible to believe that she could be long concealed. His fellow-servants were in their usual places: but some were in attendance on the Nawab, and brought occasional messages from him to Sozun. These were sometimes delivered by Nasir himself, sometimes by others; in short, there was a

perpetual going to and fro, which could not be prevented. It was next to impossible, also, to keep the ordinary women-servants out of the private apartments without exciting suspicion, and he had several times, with dread at his heart, observed them whispering together, especially as the afternoon advanced; and once or twice, Chandbee, the head of the female attendants, tried the padlock of the closed door, wondered why it was shut, declared she must break it open if the key were not found, and was promised by Nasir as often that he would look for it.

Now the little Janum, who was a child of six or thereabouts, though passionately devoted to her kind mistress, whose pet she was, was also the general pet and plaything of the eunuchs on guard, and in particular of one of them, Juma, a negro of gigantic stature, a good-natured fellow, who was an especial favourite of his master's; and as the three women were speaking in the inner chamber, Janum had been bid to carry out the plates from which Julia Wharton and Anna had eaten, with injunctions to set them down and speak to no one. Probably, had she seen nobody she would have done her errand faithfully, though the longing to tell of the beautiful Englishwoman was burning at her heart; but as she went out, Juma, who was sitting, his sword across his knees, as usual in the corridor, caught her, and held her fast.

'Let me go, let me go!' she cried; 'I cannot stay.'

'No; I have caught you,' he said playfully; 'and till you tell me what the lady is doing, I won't let you go.'

'She is tired with yesterday's fighting, and is asleep, said the child.

'Ah, Janum, that's a lie! Who ate all the pilao and the kabobs that I brought up?' said the man, laughing.

'Let me go!' cried the child.

'Who ate the kabobs, I say?' continued the man, again lifting her up, dishes and all, into the air. 'Tell me, and I'll set you down.'

'I won't tell you, Juma.'

'Tell me,' he persisted, 'and I'll give you such good julaybees.'

'I won't—let me go.'

'Very well: then I won't let you go.'

'Will you promise not to tell any one, if I tell you? Nasir would kill me if he knew, and so would mother.'

'I will;' and he set her down.

'Swear on my neck, Juma.'

He put his hand on her neck, with mock gravity. 'I swear,' he said.

'Oh, she is so beautiful!' whispered the child.

'She—who?'

'The Feringi; and we took off all her dirty clothes, and oh! she was as white as milk all over, and—'

'Ph-e-w!' whistled the negro to himself: 'what strange creatures these women are! Here is one, a prime favourite, thinking to gain more favour by bringing in another. But it doesn't answer, and they don't see it. A Feringi, too! Perhaps if I were—'

'And the julaybees, Juma?' cried the child, stroking his cheek.

'I will go and get them from the shop close by, my darling. When I knock, come out again, and thou shalt have them,' he said; and the child vanished.

Juma was not a bright character, but he was as faithful as a dog to his master. 'She wants to surprise him,' he said, 'but I'll give him the first news. If the Feringi hath bathed and eaten, she is quite ready. I can but go and see. I am on my way to the durbar with a message,' he said, as he passed out; 'one of you must take my place,' and he went on.

2. *Sozun Imprisoned*

The durbar tents were full of people. All the state officers were there; and several of the English gentlemen were sitting in a corner on the ground, haggard, dirty, and weary. The native bankers of the city were huddled in groups near them, with dread plainly impressed on their countenances. There were several Persian writers busily making up an account, and a heap of money lying upon the carpet.

'It is impossible,' cried the Nawab, angrily. 'Fifty thousand rupees only! Am I a child to believe that you great Feringi merchants traded upon fifty thousand rupees? Beware, I say, lest I put you to the torture.'

'Your Highness can do as you please,' said one of the Englishmen, rising; 'there is no more, and the Persian cash-book of yesterday proves it,' and he sat down again.

What did Juma care for the cash-book? He took his place behind the Nawab's seat, and, watching an opportunity, bent down and whispered a few words in his ear.

The assembly saw the Nawab start, but were too polite to notice it, and after a moment he resumed his questions.

But it was clear to those who knew him best that he was now uneasy, and men in whispers asked why he should be so. It was already dusk in the tent, for the evening was cloudy, and threatened rain. The scribes, writing on their knees, shifted their positions to get more light, and one even asked for a lamp. The Nawab would perhaps have continued his work; he was by no means satisfied with what he had done; he was baffled altogether in his spoil; he had expected millions, and after all there were but a few thousands. But who was this Feringi woman, so beautiful, for Juma's description was an exaggeration of what he had heard from the child? On the one hand was the craving for gold, on the other a fast arising lust; and such men as he obey the stronger passion. 'Put the Feringis in irons, and take them to camp,' he cried. 'We will hear more to-morrow. The durbar is closed.'

'Durbar burkhast! Durbar burkhast!' roared the silver macemen. 'Depart! depart!'

'Quick!' cried the Nawab, as he entered his palan-keen—'quick to the house!' and he leaned back, smiling at the anticipation of what he should find ready for him.

The room where the women sat was already gloomy, and it seemed as though night were closing in. 'It will soon be dark, lady,' said Sozun, who had been looking out from time to time, 'and the Nawab will stay till past

the evening prayer. She is not afraid?' she asked of the servant.

'Missy Baba, my lady, has no fear,' was the reply. 'May we go?'

'What does she say, Anna? may we go?' asked Julia Wharton, rising.

'Nearly time to go, mem; when man come, then go. Missy not be'fraid, I go with her.'

A few minutes after, Sozun went to the door of the small staircase; a man's footsteps were ascending it, and she stood there trembling.

'Lady, it is I,' said Nasir, in a low voice. 'Here is a blanket for her, come—there is no one without.'

'Now we go, Missy, darlin',' cried Anna, joyfully. 'Come along, an' I take you safe to Begum Sahib.'

Mrs. Wharton stretched out her hand to Sozun, who took it and kissed it reverently. 'May Allah be kind to thee,' she said; 'do not forget me when you are happy in your dear country.'

Julia did not understand the words, but the action could not be mistaken. She put her arms round the girl's neck and kissed her.

'Come, come quickly!' cried the eunuch. 'Why do you delay?'

So they went on, and Sozun followed them, weeping. It was a short stair, which ended in a small court, and Nasir led them into it. But they were too late. As he opened the door which led into the street, and they stepped out, there was a sudden blaze of torches, and the Nawab, hurrying on on foot to the private entrance, saw the group before him pause irresolutely; then he cried to Juma and others with him, 'Seize them instantly. Who come out of my zenana disguised and muffled? Nasir, who are these?'

An instant more, and the coverings were torn from the now shrieking women, and the bright torchlight revealed the English girl's fair face and white arms, as she waved them wildly in the air struggling with Juma, who took her up like a child and carried her in.

'She would have escaped,' cried the Nawab, foaming with rage, 'and thou, Nasir, aiding her. Hew him down!'

'Spare me, O Prince!' exclaimed the man, frantically, falling at his feet. 'Oh, have pity! it was not I—not I!'

'It was my order!' cried Sozun, who had turned when she heard the shrieks. 'It was mine only; he is beneath thy notice. I, Sozun, would have sent her away. What is she, a poor Feringi woman, to thee?'

A fearful execration burst from the Nawab as he drew a dagger from his girdle and aimed a furious blow at her. The girl evaded it, but did not quail; she feared death too little.

'Strike,' she cried, 'if thou darest, one whose only crime is loving thee!'

The Nawab's uplifted arm fell to his side. 'Thou art a witch,' he said, gloomily; 'and I am captive in thy devilish arts. Bind her!' he cried, to other eunuchs, whom the disturbance had collected. 'Put her in irons, and take her away to Moorshedabad. Now, now! she is in thy charge, Roostum,' he continued, to one of the men, 'and thy life shall answer for her. Listen,' he added rapidly, in a whisper—'let her lie with the Begum in the vault;' and he passed on up the narrow staircase, where Juma, bearing the shrieking English girl, had already gone, driving Anna before him.

'Come, lady,' said the eunuch to Sozun, as he dashed tears from his eyes—'come; it is thy destiny, and thou knowest we dare not delay.'

'Yes, it is my destiny,' she said, calmly, 'and thy will, O Allah!' and she bowed her head and followed them out.

CHAPTER XV

COLONEL CLIVE AT MADRAS

COLONEL CLIVE had heard, by an official communication, that one Mr. Ralph Smithson, a junior officer in the service, had been sent to Madras with the despatches from the Calcutta fleet, and though curious to hear, from one who had been engaged in them, an account of the recent transactions there, the mere name, as we may imagine, excited no kind of interest.

But when Ralph Smithson—having ascertained the probable hour of Colonel Clive's arrival at Madras, and the house where he was to put up being nigh to that in which he was a guest—went thither and claimed a private audience, the astonishment of the Colonel may be better imagined than described, when the youth to whom he had been introduced a year before as Ralph Darnell, entered the room and respectfully tendered his salutation.

'Mr. Smithson!' exclaimed the Colonel, looking at the card which the native attendant had taken in, and then at Ralph—'Smithson? God bless me! I never forget faces. I have seen you before, surely, and if ever there was a Darnell countenance on earth, it is yours. Who are you?'

'I am indeed, sir, Ralph Darnell—the lad whom you saw in the parlour of the office in Lombard Street—the lad you asked to accompany you to India, and said there should be "one Colonel Darnell at least among the merchants. Ah, sir! much has happened since then—much, very much; my name even is changed, and I have to explain this to you if you will kindly listen to me; but we must not be interrupted".'

'Sit down—sit down,' said the Colonel, kindly. 'Let no one in till I give permission,' he said to the native attendant. 'I have private business with this gentleman.'

'And your uncle, Mr. Darnell—he is well, I hope?'

'I received a letter from him just before I left Fultah, sir, which I will show you by-and-by,' said Ralph.

'God bless me!' continued Colonel Clive, 'I can hardly believe my eyes that I see you here. Yes, the same fresh colour, the same quivering mouth and nostril. I well remember you, young gentleman; I thought there was some good stuff in you then, and I am seldom wrong in my judgments. Improved, too, by Jove! since then; more manly, and a good deal of sadness in your face. What has happened you? Nay, be assured, and speak to me as you would to a dear friend—to your uncle, Mr. Darnell, if he were here. There is no man on earth I love more dearly, sir, than Roger Darnell.'

I think this speech gave more assurance than he would otherwise have possessed to the young man, for the quivering mouth and nostril which the Colonel had

observed, were the results of more inward emotion than Ralph could easily suppress, and he had well-nigh broken down altogether; but under the Colonel's kind manners and genuine expressions of regard, Ralph began his story, and without the suppression of any fact, or attempt at extenuation of his own conduct, told it all—yes, humiliating as much of it was, told it all; and Colonel Clive felt, as he once more looked through the young man, that there had been no reservation, while in the letters that Ralph handed for his perusal, there was ample proof of his forgiveness by both his uncles. 'I can say no more, sir,' said Ralph, as the Colonel handed him back the letters; 'you see how it is, and why I am no longer Ralph Darnell, the boy you knew in Lombard Street, but Ralph Smithson, at your service, sir, entirely, and longing to serve under you, if you will take me now as I am—disgraced, but forgiven.'

'By Jove! as strange a history as ever I heard,' said the Colonel.

'Most of us here who leave England to cut out our way in life have strange histories that are told only on deathbeds, for last instructions, or when a man is gasping out his soul with a bullet hole in his breast; but here you and I sit with no such pressure upon either of us, and you honour me with this confidence! I respect it, Mr. Smithson; you shall be Ralph Darnell no longer, nor till, as may be, I have to salute you as Sir Ralph Darnell of Melcepeth. For the present, you are better as you are; and if you will accept Robert Clive for your friend, and help him with your services, by G—, sir, you shall never have reason to regret it.'

Ralph Smithson took the hand frankly held out to him, and kissed it fervently. I think the foolish fellow would even have dropped on his knees, as he did to his uncle, on an occasion that we may remember, but he was prevented, and I do not know that the Colonel thought the worse of the young man for the action, nor for his wet cheeks, which were glistening with fast falling tears. At last he had found a friend, and like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, he felt he could shelter himself there.

'And now, Mr. Smithson,' said the Colonel, 'tell me about this Calcutta business; but you are not in the army—perhaps you did not see much of it?'

'I am not in the army, certainly,' he replied; 'but I fought at Perrin's Redoubt; I commanded a battery in the siege; and I was one of the last on the walls when the Fort was stormed.'

'And you escaped, Ralph?'

'Not entirely, sir. I had a sharp wound on my arm, and some other hurts; but they are well long since,' he added, modestly.

'And you were in the Black Hole and escaped?'

'I was, sir.'

'By Jove, a hero already! Why, at your age, I hadn't done half as much myself; I congratulate you, sir. Now for some details: I have a plan of the Fort here; will you explain it, and what was done for the defence?—though, indeed, little could be done with such a place as that.'

I think Ralph Smithson must have acquitted himself well under the professional examination which followed, for the Colonel encouraged him from time to time, asked his opinion of the native troops, and agreed with his young friend that, with the exception of the Rohillas who stormed the Fort, the rest were very cowardly. In short, the frankness and good sense with which the Colonel's questions were answered, and the evident local knowledge which Ralph Smithson possessed, contributed to raise him very considerably in Colonel Clive's opinion.

'You have told all this to the Council, I presume, Mr. Smithson?' he asked.

'No one ever asked me half as much as you have, sir,' was the reply, 'and I only answered immaterial questions.'

'Then come to the Council with me to-day, and they shall see the stuff you are made of—good Darnell stuff, and no doubt about it; just what I expected.'

'Ah, sir,' cried Smithson, entreatingly, 'do not forget the new name; my uncle is so well known that—'

'No fear of me, Ralph Smithson,' replied the Colonel, laughing; 'I will respect your secret and your confidence.'

'The Council is waiting, sir; they have sent twice, but master say not open door,' cried a servant without.

'Quite right, Ramasamy—let them wait. I'll lay my life, Smithson, that those old fogies don't settle anything for the next two months, and after all won't desire to send me; but I'll go, one way or other, by G—!' he cried, excitedly; 'Robert Clive has work cut out for him there that no one else can do, or I'm much mistaken. Yes, Mister Bussy, they wouldn't let me have a slap at you in the Dekhan, but, by George! Ralph, we'll be before him in Bengal, and turn those cursed Frenchmen out.'

Colonel Clive was right: the Council at Madras, as I have already recorded, with grave history to support me, wasted two precious months in preliminary discussions, and appointed him with independent power after all. I think if Ralph Smithson would, he might have received a military commission; but this he refused; as he was, he would continue to be—an independent volunteer, attached, with one Mr. Warren Hastings, to Colonel Clive only, to render such aid as he could afford.

So finally, on the 16th of October, a gallant fleet of ten ships sailed from the Madras roads; and after a weary passage, beating against the north-east monsoon which had now set in, and delayed their arrival more than a month, the expectants at Fultah, on the 20th December, as they still looked seaward with weary eyes often cheated by sails on the river's horizon, saw at last the square topsails of His Gracious Majesty's men-of-war, which, as they reached the roads, joined the long-stationary fleet decked with flags as became the occasion, and with their yards manned. The salutes fired then, and answered by the Admiral's ship, were, I think, the most memorable and joyous that have ever since perhaps been fired on the waters of the sacred river.

Then too, news spread far and fast, that a fleet of huge Feringi ships of war, each carrying a hundred guns or more, had come to the rescue of Calcutta; and the native commander of the Fort there, as every other local officer of the province, despatched expresses to Moorsshedabad to the same effect, that they were

ready to die in the Nawab's service, but, if he desired to preserve his conquest, he must return to Calcutta with his whole army. Letters for the Prince himself, which were written from the English fleet, following the news report—(though the native commandant of Calcutta dared not forward them to his master)—proved plainly enough that a new vigour had been infused into the English councils, of which he had no experience, for the language was not that of abject suppliants for favour, but of haughty conquerors. Colonel Clive had not a thousand English soldiers with him; yet he was thinking it possible to rout the Nawab's army of 50,000 men should it appear against him, and was determined to exact retribution to the uttermost from a cruel enemy who, in his moment of triumph, had shown no mercy.

CHAPTER XVI

COLONEL CLIVE AT CALCUTTA

NOR did the leaders of the expedition await replies to these communications. During his varied service in the Peninsula of India, Colonel Clive had already gained much experience of a political character, and much practical knowledge of the *morale* of Indian soldiery. He knew better than any one else present the necessity for immediate and decisive action, and what effect a few hard blows struck rapidly in succession would have upon native enemies, and native friends too. Calcutta must be regained before any political negotiation could ensue; and, though two of the ships had not yet arrived, and many men and much war material were in them that could be ill spared, yet there was sufficient force present to overcome all obstacles between the rendezvous of the fleet and Calcutta. In these respects there seemed no difficulties that could not be overcome.

When Manikchund, the Governor of Calcutta, brought down two thousand picked men to oppose the Feringis on this occasion, and boasted of the heads he would take back to make a pile of before the Fort-gate against the

Nawab's coming, he little expected to be met with a ringing cheer from the 39th, the 'Primus in Indis,' and the Madras Sepoys, as the Colonel led them on; and so fell back in utter confusion, and fled away. He could not save the Fort, and the impression caused by his precipitate flight was that the English ships contained thousands of men; and it was certain that the reports of the people of the country, which flew faster than the fugitives, fearfully exaggerated all realities.

As to the Fort, broadsides from English men-of-war, which had never before been fired in those waters, were very terrible in the sight of people who had hitherto seen no ships but the peaceful merchant vessels of the Company on their trading voyages; and as ship after ship of the Royal squadron let go her anchor before the little fort of Budge-Budge, and, as the sails were being furled aloft, let fly broadside after broadside against its walls, sending stones, bricks, and mud parapets flying about the ears of the garrison, it is no wonder perhaps, that, when night fell, the terrified survivors of the day crept quietly out of the place, and made the best of their way northwards.

The voyage up the broad Hoogly was indeed more like a triumphant naval procession than a warlike armament; and the fleet of Royal ships, followed by the transports, all with flags flying and drums beating at quarters, the red uniforms of the soldiery in the waists, and the gay laced coats of the officers glancing from the poops, must have appeared to the wonder-struck Hindus who lined the banks as incarnations of supernatural power, whose might was to be deprecated rather than opposed: and indeed resistance there was none. The movements of the fleet depended mainly upon the tide, and it swept on day after day majestically under easy sail, passing towns and villages, mosques and temples, rice-fields, groves, and jungle, in stately array.

A strange contrast was it in Ralph Smithson's mind with his lonely sail up the river in the dear old *Valiant*, when all with which he was now familiar was new to him. Then he was an unknown and untried youth, whose highest ambition was to be a merchant; now, he

had already achieved some military distinction. He was looked up to by many of His Majesty's officers with respect, which was increased and increasing by his position with Colonel Clive. One who had borne himself right gallantly in the affairs before Calcutta, and who, as all allowed, had been one of the last to quit the walls of the Fort in the attack upon it—who had evinced the highest spirit at Budge-Budge, and who was not a 'country officer'—had already taken his place among the best of the Royal officers present, and needed no further introduction to their exclusive society ; and many a man envied, while they all heartily congratulated him on, the distinction he had gained. We must remember how young he still was ; but he had nevertheless reached that age when decisive steps in life can best be taken and pursued with ardour and enthusiasm. What were the desk, the huge wearisome ledgers, the interminable columns of rupees, annas, and pies to be added and checked, or the voluminous invoices and accounts of sales and stock, now to him ?

'I began with them myself, Ralph,' said the Colonel, as they interchanged hearty greetings on the 1st January, 1757, and wished each other many happy years, 'and have forsaken them for what you see me—a poor man, where others have made their fortunes, and gone home to enjoy them. But there's no glory in that. Come with me, and whatever honour I can win, you shall have your share of. I cannot indeed spare you, Ralph ; and I intend to write to that grave old uncle of yours about the colonelship I talked to him of, and he will come round to my way of thinking—see if he don't. No, Ralph ; 1756 sees the end of your attempt at being a merchant, and 1757 begins it as a soldier, and in this no one shall gainsay me.'

In their private conversation Mr. Clive was beginning to shadow forth the beginning of the end. Baffled in England, when troops were denied him for driving Bussy from the Dekhan, he had accepted a minor position at Madras ; but the spirit had chafed within him at inaction there, and was little likely to be still, now that there was opportunity of effecting in Bengal what had hitherto

been the dream of his life. He had been brought up at Madras in active operations against the French. He had witnessed their successful striving for political power. He was aware that if Bussy could join Law at Pondicherry, and so reinforce the Nawab, their combined forces might even prove too much for his own armament, powerful as it was : and he hated them nationally and politically, as a thorough Englishman of the time hated a Frenchman, and with all the additional virus of the experience heretofore gained.

Probably the gentlemen of the Factory desired nothing more than a resumption of their old occupations ; and it was with a feeling of pride absolutely glowing in his black face that our friend Don Gomez da Silveira met his masters in the hall of the Factory, the day after the Fort was taken, and delivered to them the keys of the private safe, which contained the records of the settlement, and the invaluable books on which the recoveries of advances and debts for goods sold were dependent ; and under the congratulations of native merchants and bankers, no doubt sincere in many instances, the work of the Factory began again. Had not enough been done ? Was it wise and politic to provoke the Nawab further ? Could anything more be effected except the recovery of losses ? Colonel Clive was, however, of opinion that his work had only begun, and was little likely to be turned from his purpose by timid counsels, which had only the recovery of these losses for their foundation. The troops required supplies which Calcutta could ill afford, and the garrison of Hoogly was boastful and defiant—but not for long. That city was stormed and sacked in a few days more, its garrison dispersed, and the native defenders of the province existed no longer. Then also, by a strange chance, news of the declaration of war between England and France reached Bengal, and was received with an interest which I can feebly portray. My reader may imagine Colonel Clive's exultation at an event by which his own aspirations were no longer fettered, and the amazement of the Calcutta gentlemen at this new complication of affairs. But there were others who listened to these tidings, which poured fast, one upon another

into the Prince's durbar at Moorshedabad; and we had better, perhaps, after having been so long tarrying with our own countrymen, inquire how they affected him, and others concerned about him.

CHAPTER XVII

THE NAWAB'S TROUBLES

1. The Turn of the Tide

THE place is the same as that in which, we may remember, in his fit of fury, Suraj-oo-Doulah had caused the Derwesh to be mutilated, and where the cries of terrible vengeance against the English had resounded through the lofty hall of audience. Since then, Calcutta had been taken, and for six months the conquest had been undisturbed even by a rumour. The ships of the English lay at the mouth of the river, but attempted no return, and the bankers, who had been their fast friends in spite of their misfortunes, had almost begun to fear that they were gone for ever, and that the transactions with them, which had been the source of steady and increasing gain for many a year, were never to be renewed. Reports from the Nawab's district-collectors and other fiscal agents began to come in fast, that the revenue was languishing for want of support by the English trade, and unless the Prince himself would direct large advances to be made to supply the want of English capital, the cultivation must still further languish.

Under these circumstances, the late victorious expedition seemed likely not only to prove barren of results, but to induce a general discontent which had not been foreseen. In place of untold wealth in the Factory, the Nawab had only found a paltry sum, as we know, and the piles of broadcloth and calico, of hardware and general English goods, were useless to transport, and as useless for sale. The Nawab's commander, Manikchund, could not represent the English gentlemen, and Omi-chund and Juggut Seit and other Calcutta merchants

declined transactions in general or particular with him. They were afraid to buy the plunder of the English. 'Who knows?' the people said; 'they may come back, and then?' The Calcutta bankers had agents too at Madras, and these wrote in their own cipher—an enigmatical language which it is difficult to imitate—that an armament was being prepared there, in which great war-ships would take a part, and many white soldiers would be sent; again that the ships had sailed. So each after his own fashion had expected the English, and those who had gained their bread by them, or under whose protection they flourished and grew rich, offered many a sacrifice to propitiate the gods, and many a vow of feeding Brahmins, and of giving largesse to the poor, and thought their prayers answered when Calcutta was taken, and the English expedition to Hoogly returned triumphant.

From the first day on which the Nawab—sitting there among his parasites and courtiers, seeing for the hundredth time the horrible scene of the Black Hole enacted before him, and the struggling, writhing Feringis climbing upon each other's backs fighting for water, shrieking, blaspheming, praying, and seeming to die in horrible contortions at the window-bars—heard the news of the arrival of the King's fleet at Fultah, laughed in drunken merriment, and, mocking the power of his enemies, told those around him that he had it from his friends the French, that there were not ten thousand soldiers in all England, and that not a man dared be sent, because the French with a mighty army were about to invade the country of their mutual enemy and destroy them all—from that day forward, I say, letters came rapidly in succession; and the royal news-writers attached to the military posts seemed to vie with each other as to who should most forcibly describe in flowing Persian the vast naval armament—the thousands of its guns—their terrible fire—and the drunken ferocity of Feringi soldiers—as excuses for cowardice; and thus the events we already know of had been listened to with increasing rage and gloom. It was in vain that minstrels sang or women danced—it was in vain that coarse buffoons played their

most outrageous and indecent acts, or that astrologers consulted the stars, and gave forth their dubious responses ; and when, on the evening I speak of, a messenger rushed breathless into the hall, and, untying his turban, gave to an attendant the despatch he had brought by express—the assembly present knew, as the Nawab read the paper himself, and his countenance assumed a savage expression, that some calamitous news had reached him ; and all waited in apprehension, not unmingled with terror, for the result.

The letter was brief enough. Hoogly had been stormed and taken, thousands of true believers had suffered martyrdom, and the Feringis had sacked the town, carrying away lacs of treasure and property. Would not the Nawab send an army to save the country and his faithful people, and drive the accursed English back to their ships ? Unless he did so, the English army would march on, and there was no one to oppose it.

I think that, as the Nawab at last read aloud the letter he had already twice perused, and laughed a hollow laugh, in which he vainly tried to disguise his own vexation, a strange dread and fear fell upon all who, craning over each other's necks, heard the fresh news. It had been utterly incomprehensible how the few Englishmen they remembered, the peaceful, patient merchants, could be transformed suddenly into revengeful victorious warriors ; but there was no doubt in the last news. They had not halted at Calcutta : they were carrying, as was then believed, fort after fort, and city after city, and could not be stayed : so all who listened remembered the fearful act for which retribution was now being exacted : and what would satisfy it ?

Who dare offer advice ? Not one, I believe, of that company of holiday courtiers dared to have uttered a sound, for fear truly had fallen upon their hearts—or worse than fear, treachery, was taking up its abode there. In their master's present humour, who dare speak ?

The Nawab glanced round on the dismayed countenances, and saw no comfort. I will not look into his own

heart, for there is nothing pleasant there, nothing hopeful—only much hate, and desire of bloody extermination. ‘Does no one speak?’ he cried at length. ‘Cowards and faithless as ye all are, does no one speak a word of comfort to your Prince?’ but still the silence continued, and its effect, so rare and continuous, was almost awful.

‘Nawab,’ at last cried the grim old Afghan chief whom we may remember, who rose and drew up his tall figure, now clad in a loose suit of chain-mail, with a proud gesture,—‘Nawab, when Calcutta was stormed, who did it? When the Feringis fell in scores, who slew them? Hast thou forgotten, or is it with thee as with many another, that brave deeds are forgotten, and swords may rust in their scabbards when present danger is past? See, mine is as bright as ever!’ and as he spoke he drew it flashing from its scabbard; ‘but it would be dim again in Feringi blood if thy heart is enough of a man’s to lead us on. As thou art, a woman were better—not one who has lost his manhood in company with a Feringi wanton!’

It was well that the fiery old man was surrounded by a strong body of his clan, or perhaps he would never have left that assembly alive. If Eastern princes have for the most part to listen to empty platitudes or gross flatteries, there are occasions on which disagreeable truths are spoken in more than ordinarily forcible language, and this was one of them.

‘Treachery, treachery! He has insulted the Prince! hew him down!’ cried a hundred voices, mingled with obscene oaths, and many a weapon was unsheathed; but the old warrior stood erect and firm; and his clansmen, rising and throwing their shields before him, presented a phalanx before which the courtiers and eunuchs quailed. There were matchlockmen on guard at the entrance, who rushed into the court with lighted matches; but on whom were they to fire? friends and foes were intermingled, and inseparable.

‘Peace!’ cried the Nawab, who had risen as the door to his private apartments was opened, and the eunuch Juma tried to urge him into it—‘peace! put down thy sword, Noor Khan; this is no place for wild brawling.’

'We can slay him as he goes out, my Prince,' whispered Juma, 'if thou wilt come away.'

But Suraj-oo-Doulah did not fear him then; he had no personal fear—he was too strongly guarded. 'Peace,' he cried, shaking off the negro. 'Noor Khan, listen! when I send for thee, wilt thou come?—as a friend and a trusted and honoured servant, wilt thou come?'

'Send one known to thee and me for my safe-conduct,' he said, 'and I will come; not else, my lord,' cried the old man—'not else. Death, no servant of Allah fears, and of my life thou hast ever been master; but of my honour I am my own guardian. I salute you, Prince, and pray permission to depart.'

'Thou hast it—go,' said the Nawab, 'and be ready when I send for thee,' and he passed into the private rooms. 'Where is she?' he asked of Juma, now an especial favourite.

'Within,' was the reply; 'but wilt thou have his head to-night? Speak the word, and I will bring it thee.'

'I will tell thee presently.'

'He insulted thee, my Prince,' persisted the negro, doggedly, 'and should die that others may fear.'

Die! How many had died? How many had suffered torture and mutilation for alleged treachery, in caprice, or in mad drunken revels? How many more would die? and yet was he safe? Yes; no insult that had ever been offered him was like that, rankling deep down in his heart. Send her! send Sozun! Was she not in irons in the vault? and yet, if he did not, Noor Khan would not trust him; the Rohillas in his force would be in mutiny by the morning, and who could quell them? If they pleased, they might depose him, tie him to the foot of an elephant, and—I think it was these thoughts which passed like quick flashes through Suraj-oo-Doulah's heart, as he stood irresolute for an instant in the chamber, which caused him to shudder as if a cold blast had struck him, and which were terrible to endure. I question whether he had any one to whom he could turn now.

'Shall I send for Mohun Lall?' asked the negro; 'his counsel may be better than your slave's.'

'Get thee to hell! and Mohun Lall too,' cried the Nawab, striking him. 'Blood! yes, more blood, he would say, as thou dost—butcher as thou art.'

'I could kill Noor Khan as I would a sheep,' said the giant; 'why should my lord be angry with me?'

'But thou couldst not kill all his people, Juma; and if they will not fight for me, the Feringi will kill me,' returned the Nawab. 'No; bring her to me—her the singer. It must be,' he muttered, 'else—'

'Ah yes, I understand now,' returned the man; 'give me thy seal-ring. And if she will not come?'

'You carried a shrieking woman once up a staircase,' said the Nawab, bitterly, 'and can do it again.'

'On my head and eyes be it,' replied the eunuch—'I will not fail. When?'

'As soon as possible,' was the reply. 'I fear not that she should see her,' and he passed in.

2. *Julia's Trials*

Anna was sitting at the door, and rose respectfully. She was necessary to the Nawab, and he had loaded her with gifts. To her the months that had passed had been as pleasant as any she could remember of her long life. She had, after her Portuguese Eastern fashion, accommodated herself to the strict seclusion of the zenana, and she knew that intrigue or correspondence without could end only in death; so she had submitted to her fate. Had her mistress done the same?

It would have been impossible, and unnatural. The English girl was as virgin snow before him into whose power her wayward fate had thrown her. She had lived—that was enough. She had sighed and prayed for death, but it did not come; and helpless, very helpless, she had resigned herself to her fate. At first she had fallen into the same raving fever which attacked so many others after the night of the 20th June, and had recovered from it worn and wasted, and with her beauty gone; and for a long time, Anna, who never left her, thought she would not recover; but even that fatal gift had returned, and remained in some sort. There were gardens in which she could walk, and in which she spent most of

her time ; but her mind was, I think, growing into a kind of numb vacancy of submission, rather than conscious endurance of her condition.

'Where is your mistress, the lady?' asked the Nawab.

'Within, reading her book, my lord,' was the reply.

'She is ever reading, and never speaks to me,' he said, almost sadly. 'Dost thou know aught in which I could gratify her?'

'My lord will pardon his slave. She frets after her people night and day, and weeps. If she could hear of them, she would be thankful,' replied the woman.

'I have just received news of them,' he said bitterly ; 'come and tell her.'

Reading ! Ah yes ; in the pocket of the dress which Anna had brought away, was the little prayer-book, out of which she had read the psalms on that eve of massacre which we may remember, and she had kept it lovingly ever since. The Nawab respected it as containing the words of Jesus of Nazareth, revered even by the most bigoted of his priests—the only book she had ; read sometimes in vague dreaminess, sometimes in bitter but unavailing grief, sometimes in humble faith. He had asked Julia Wharton to become a Mahomedan ; but she had fallen into such deep misery at the thought, that even he relented, and had troubled her no more. The last words of the poor soldier, ejaculated so awfully in the prison, had not been forgotten. She had searched for them and found them, and had read the verses with streaming eyes and a contrite heart. So, as He who had sent the trial knew best, she had lived, and prayed after a simple fashion of her own, which, unknown before, had grown up in her heart.

Memories ! oh, many, many ! Very hard to endure at first, but growing blunted by constant recurrence, and only occasionally causing misery. Even Anna forbore to speak of past times, and avoided all allusion to them, for it was on recurrence to these subjects that her poor mistress's spirit utterly refused comfort, and, recovering after a while, grew again to be dull and dead. But this scene could not be avoided.

'O dear, Missis,' cried the servant as she entered the room suddenly, followed by the Nawab; 'my lord got news for you.'

'What news?' replied Julia sadly, putting down her book and not noticing his entrance.

'He tell himself,' she said, 'and I tell my lady.' And the conversation continued through the interpreter.

'Your people are in Calcutta once more, lady,' said the Nawab, seating himself on his usual pile of cushions.

'And you have returned it to them? O sir! is this true?' she cried, looking up with a sudden rush of colour to her cheek, and a flash of intelligence in her eyes which he had never seen before.

'They have taken it and slain my people,' he said, with an impatient gesture; 'and it is too late now, for there is once more blood between us. But could it have gained me thy love, lady, I had offered it to thee long ago. Now it is too late.'

She was silent.

'Thou dost not care to hear of their victory over their enemy?'

Ah, poor bleeding heart, it was throbbing fast now! Her own people—would she ever be given up to them? Should she see them once more? She could hide herself away somewhere in her own land, and this hideous life would be a thing of the past. What a flood of thought rushed into her memory in an instant! 'Send me to them, O Prince! send me to them?' she said in the broken Hindi she had learned; 'what am I to thee, or thou to me?' And she clasped her hands convulsively, and fell on her knees before him, sobbing piteously.

'Send thee to them, lady!' he cried, savagely; 'to them? Never! Let it not come into thy dreams that I ever spared an enemy! They shall die as others died; or I must die, and thou with me! Kaffirs! I hate them to death, and beyond death to hell. Take her away, Anna—she is mad. Take her away, lest I destroy her for the beauty which unmans me. Protection of God! I was told in my own durbar to-day that I had lost my manhood for a Feringi wanton! Am I to endure insult for

her? Begone! take her away, for I am wellnigh mad myself to-night!—Who is there?’

As he spoke, Juma's burly form emerged from the stairhead, which opened into the chamber, and, advancing with little ceremony, he set down in the midst of them a woman he had thrown across his shoulders. Irons on her legs clanked as the feet reached the ground, and the figure sank down, as in a heap.

‘Slave! thou hast not slain her?’ cried the Nawab eagerly.

‘No, no, she's well enough; she would talk, and this was the shortest way to manage such a girl,’ cried Juma, wiping his forehead, and departing as he had come.

Julia Wharton's memory had not failed her, and as the figure raised its head and looked round dreamily, the features of the Afghan girl were fully revealed by the lamp-light. ‘Save me! oh, send me to my people!’ was all she could cry in her terrible sobbing, as she bent forward to the prostrate figure.

But she was not heeded. Sozun seemed awaking from a stupor. She was changed—much changed. The once ruddy cheek was white and wan, the large brown eyes seemed increased in size, and had a vacant expression, as she looked round her for a moment and shut them again; her once glorious figure was wasted, and her round white arms grown thin and gaunt.

‘Strike! kill me at once—with one blow!’ she said, rising to her knees, as she repeated the belief of her creed. ‘Strike! I am ready—now—now—why dost thou not strike?’ She evidently expected death.

‘It is thus brave men die,’ said the Nawab, with a sigh—‘without a tremor; and she is as brave. Look up, Sozun; thou art a fool, as thou ever wast,’ he continued half kindly; ‘look up, O my darling! and fear not.’

‘The girl did look up, and Julia Wharton never forgot the glance of scorn and defiance with which the bold eyes of the Afghan met those of the man in whose hands both their destinies seemed placed.

‘Why dost thou not kill me?’ she said; ‘what hast

thou to do with me ? Is not the Feringi enough ? Art thou afraid ? ’

‘ Silence ! ’ hissed the Nawab between his teeth, as he caught her arm ; ‘ do not provoke me to kill thee to-night, for truly devils have possession of me, and I burn as with fire—the fire of that Feringi witch. Away with ye ! ’ he cried to Anna ; ‘ take her away ! I would be alone. Begone ! ’

‘ Come away, lady,’ whispered the servant hurriedly, dragging Julia to her feet. ‘ I not like him to-night ’t all ; he mad or drunk. Come away to your own room, an’ lock the door.’

And so they escaped.

CHAPTER XVIII

SOZUN AND HER PEOPLE

1. Sozun’s Vow

‘ SHE is gone, Sozun ; look up once more as thou used to look on one who hath done thee wrong. I have none but thee now—none but thee ! ’

‘ Thou wouldst not kill me ; why didst thou not strike as I knelt ? Where is the slave who brought me ? The bitterness of death was past then. Ah, my lord ! ’

But not now : some renewed desire of life had come upon the girl, as she sank down covering her face with her hands, with a choking at her throat, over which her slender fingers moved nervously. The bitterness, the excitement of near death, as it had seemed to her, had passed away with the broken sentences she had gasped forth.

‘ Here is water ! drink, O my beloved ! and once more speak to me,’ said the Nawab ; and he filled a silver cup from a water jar and held it to her lips.

Sozun drank slowly, for the oppression at her throat seemed that of death ; and unable to sit up, she sank down again, after a few attempts to swallow, in utter prostration.

Suraj-oo-Doulah was touched. If he had ever loved a being on earth it was this girl—so fascinating to him in her beauty and so indomitable in her spirit ; and yet what a wreck he had made of it all !

‘ I have killed her !—she is dead ! ’ he cried, frantically, dashing his turban to the ground. ‘ Ho, Juma ! Juma ! ’

But there was no reply. Juma, as he thought, when he left the chamber, had best let the tiger and tigress, as he called them in his mind, fight out their quarrel together. His master’s fancies were naught to him—was he not the Nawab, and could not he do as he pleased with his women ? No, Juma had retreated to his guard-room for the present.

Some water poured hurriedly into her mouth and upon her face, roused Sozun ; and, supporting herself upon her hand, she looked up. The Nawab’s arms were around her ; and a look of concern, alarm, and grief on his face, such as was new to her, touched her heart in spite of the wrongs she had endured from him.

‘ I have no one but thee, Sozun,’ he said—‘ none but thee, O my beloved ! Canst thou forgive my madness ? I have been mad, Sozun—bewitched ; the sorcery of the Feringis is upon me ; but I fear them not if thou art true. Thy destiny and mine are one—was it not thus said, and was it not proved ? ’

She sighed dreamily ; and as she moved, the irons on her legs clanked.

‘ They have been there for six months,’ she said, pointing to them, ‘ and have eaten into my heart. I am no longer Sozun, but a thing of the past—dead to all life, though I cannot die. Why didst thou not slay me ?—it would have been so merciful ! ’

I think if ever Suraj-oo-Doulah felt shame, it was when the girl pointed to the irons on her legs and said they had eaten into her heart. How those weary six months had passed, who could tell but herself ? With what paroxysms of fierce anger at first, of revengeful threats, of dull despair. Like her fellow-captive, she had been put away in that vault out of sight of man, to live or to die as it might please Allah ; but unlike her in all respects, save that they were women. At first the

ravings of the Afghan girl shocked and terrified the unfortunate Begum; but we have already seen that Sozun could be kind and generous. There was no detested rivalry now; only alike for each, a pallet-bed, coarse clothes, and a dreary fate. Feeling the wrong of which she had been the instrument to an unoffending fellow-woman, Sozun could not resist the influence of the gentle resignation and the loving companionship of her once-fancied rival; and, bowing herself at last before her, besought her forgiveness, and vowed to her truth and service such as she could render. This summons at last, she thought, was the punishment of her life—first dishonour, then triumph, then destruction. There remained but death to end all, and the Afghan dancer would be forgotten, as a hundred others before her.

Six months had the iron eaten into her heart. Did her countrymen know of her disgrace and her condition? I think if they had known they would have pulled down the palace stone by stone till they found her, and who would have dared to oppose them? But the secrets of that zenana were as the secrets of the grave. Rumour had it that the singer was not in favour, and those of her people who had believed in her promises to lead an honourable life now shrugged their shoulders and said, with a sneer, that 'when her time came she would be in favour again.'

Was it so? As the arms which had once been to her most dear were around her, and the voice tender and passionate by turns, as it used to be, sounded in her ears, was there no temptation to yield to old feelings? She had not been woman if there were not—she had not been the true loving woman she was at heart, if she were not ready to forgive the injury he had done her. In her old spirit she would have defied him—in her broken weakness the desire for revenge had died away. If he would only let her go. She had vowed her vow to the Lord's service, and would go forth to fulfil it.

'So long!' said the Nawab, 'and I did not think of thee: O my beloved, wilt thou forgive? Put thy hand on my head,' he sobbed—'on my head, and forgive me for what thou hast endured, and thou mayst lead me

where thou wilt. I was mad, Sozun—oh, I was mad !’

‘ I forgive. Ah, my lord, let the good Allah forgive us all, for we have sinned before Him. I forgive ? nay, if thou wouldst have thy slave say it, she will do so heartily. Let but these instruments of disgrace be removed, ere I am fit to touch thy head.’

‘ Nay, but for once, Sozun, before I call.’

‘ As thou wilt,’ she said ; and, laying her hand upon his head lightly, withdrew it instantly. ‘ Thou art forgiven of me,’ she continued—‘ may Allah forgive thee too.’

Juma had resumed his post, and, entering as the Nawab called, stood with his hands folded.

‘ Canst thou remove these things, Juma ? ’

‘ A woman could do it,’ he said, bending down to the girl as the Nawab turned away from the sight, and breaking the rivets with a wrench from his powerful fingers—‘ a woman could do it. Thy people are uneasy,’ he whispered to Sozun—‘ beware !’ and so went out.

They were once more alone. ‘ Come to me, Sozun,’ said the Nawab. ‘ Art thou content now ? ’

But she was silent. She had covered her face with her hands, and was sobbing silently.

‘ Why dost thou doubt me, beloved ? ’ he cried, putting his arm round her. ‘ I am not changed ; and she, thy rival, is gone.’

‘ Pardon thy slave,’ she said, coldly, withdrawing herself ; ‘ and respect my vow to God, made when I was naught to thee.’

‘ What vow, Sozun ? Art thou, too, distraught ? Have I to win thy love again as before ? What dost thou want ? Thy rival is gone, and thou art here—what more ? Jewels, clothes, wealth—thou hast them all !’

‘ Look on me, my lord,’ she cried ; ‘ look on these wan features, on this poor wasted body. Enough ! what has been, has been ; for, before Allah and the Prophet, I have vowed that man’s love can never exist within me again. Ameen ! and Ameen ! I will serve thee to death as thy slave ; but as—’

'Say it not—say it not, oh cruel!' cried the Nawab, putting his hand before her mouth. 'May God and the Prophet forgive thee for frightening me. Ah, yes! thou art jealous still. She may not remain here; and she hath bewitched me. Ho, Juma!'

'Begone!' said Sozun to the negro, with some of her old spirit—'thou art not wanted. What wouldst thou have done, O my lord, with one so helpless as she? Art thou afraid of her? Swear to me that thou will respect her henceforth, and Sozun will be true to thee.'

'I swear,' he said, taking up his Koran and kissing it—'I swear henceforth she will not be molested. Art thou content now?'

'To serve thee and love thee; but not as of old,' she continued—'that were sin. Enough that thou hast been generous.'

Long did he plead earnestly, and, as it seemed even to her, truly; but we know enough of this girl's spirit to feel that the vow she had made could not be broken. Once more, as she strove to reason with her lord, the old beauty came into her face, and the cheeks glowed, as she spoke in the figurative and seemingly inspired strain of a devotee. It was in vain that he laid treasures, lands, estates, power, at her feet—that he bowed himself down and grovelled before her. He could not change her. He might send her back to the cell—that would be welcome; but unhallowed love, now, could not be. He had heard of such devotees; but was one so young, so glorious in her beauty, to be surrendered?

So in these struggles, pleadings, and often threats, on the one hand, and the calmness of despair and fervour on the other, hours passed. Suraj-oo-Doulah told her of the English advance, and as again and again she had begged to lead her own people to victory, he as often led her back to the subject on which she was inflexible. Revenge and pity influenced him by turns; and had not the old tenderness restrained him, I believe that that night Sozun had never passed through greater trial or danger. Often had his hand been upon his dagger-hilt—often it was half-drawn from its sheath to strike her down as she refused, and even defied, his solicitations.

In her present spirit, dare he send her to Noor Khan? It seemed impossible. The old man had forgotten perhaps; but it was not so.

2. *Noor Khan*

Midnight had passed, and the many noises without, in the palace, in the streets of the town, on the river, had all ceased—except the varied tones of their own voices, there was no other sound. Often, indeed, long and painful silences had fallen on both, hard to be broken. The usual music had played off the midnight watch; and when the noise of drums and cymbals, faintly repeated in the guard-houses of the town, had ceased, there was silence again, more profound and more striking. All at once there arose a confused murmur in the courtyard below, a shuffling of feet as though of men in motion, a hurrying too and fro, and the eunuch Juma, accompanied by several others, came suddenly in.

‘The Rohillas are in motion,’ cried the slave; they are assembling and mean evil. They have taken possession of the bazaar, and are lining the houses with match-lockmen.’

‘I promised that I would send thee for Noor Khan’s safe-conduct to me,’ said the Nawab to Sozun, ‘and he thinks himself forgotten. Thou must go, beloved, else there may be mischief.’

‘Does he know of these?’ she asked, pointing to the marks which the rings had worn on her fair skin.

‘I dare not tell him,’ was the reply. ‘He insulted me in the durbar to-day; he said before all that I had wasted my manhood on a Feringi wanton; and he believes that if I do not satisfy him, I shall revenge myself.’

‘It was but the truth, my lord,’ cried the girl frankly, ‘and he has saved thee. Let me go—yes, weak as I am, I can go to him. He will trust me; but can I trust thee to bear with his rough speech and bitter humour?’

‘Bring him hither, and thou shalt see.’

‘And my lord will be saved. I know their humour, my Prince; and once more Sozun can save thy honour and her own. Bismilla! I am ready,’ she cried, rising with a strength and enthusiasm to which she had long

been a stranger ; and passing out, she snatched a blanket from an attendant, and hurried rapidly on. None opposed her ; and as she proceeded, she saw a dense column of her countrymen assembled at the end of the broad street which led up to the palace court—their lighted matches glowing in the darkness, and their drum beginning to beat, and she ran with all the speed she was capable of exerting. As she reached the column it was in movement, and the old war cry, to which she had leaped and bounded as she led her countrymen to the storm of the English Fort, was once more raised.

‘ Hold ! ’ she cried in her own rough mountain tongue.

‘ I am Sozun. Where art thou, O my father ? ’

‘ I am here, daughter,’ answered the strong voice of the old warrior. ‘ Why art thou come ? ’

‘ He has sent me to thee,’ she said. ‘ Come and save him.’

‘ Away with her ! away with the harlot ! ’ cried a hundred strong voices, which drowned her entreaties ; and as she passed from man to man, kissing their hands and beseeching them with passionate gestures, she was thrown off rudely by all. ‘ Slay her ! slay the harlot who would betray her father,’ cried a powerful voice ; ‘ why should Afghans be dishonoured in her ? ’ and a man rushed forward with his heavy sword uplifted, and would have cut her down had not his arm been arrested.

‘ Peace ! ’ cried their old leader ; ‘ if she is true, she shall live—if she be false, let her die. Where hast thou been, daughter, since thou wast with us in Calcutta ? ’ he continued briefly. ‘ Speak truly, for thou dost not fear death.’

‘ I have not been with him, O my father,’ she said humbly ; ‘ I was in the dungeon of the palace.’

‘ It is a lie—a lie ! ’ cried those around her ; ‘ let her be slain ! ’

‘ Peace ! ’ said the old man calmly. ‘ Canst thou prove this, Sozun ? ’

‘ He will tell you if you ask him,’ she said ; ‘ and look—here are the marks of the irons.’

Some men blew their matches, and held them down where she pointed, and they were satisfied. The broad

blackened rings round her ankles, which showed scars of sores, were unmistakable.

'I was released this night,' she said, 'and have come to ye, my brothers; and I have a vow to God and the Prophet to lead the life of a dervish henceforth. Slay me if ye will; but I have told ye the truth.'

Then a hoarse murmur of approbation rose, and all who were near the girl kissed her hands reverently: while the man who, in his fierce enthusiasm, would have struck her down, prostrated himself before her, and would not rise. 'Aman! Aman!' he cried, 'be merciful!'

He had been one of the foremost in the storming of Calcutta, and had helped her up to the bastion.

'Thou art forgiven, Ahmed Khan,' she said, 'If a girl's forgiveness avails thee aught. Go—Sozun has not forgotten. And now, my father, come; I have promised him to bring thee, and there is no danger.'

Then broke out passionate entreaties from his clansmen, who hung around him. They would not let him go alone—all must accompany him. But Noor Khan would not listen. Had he not promised to go if Sozun were sent?—and she was here. She took him by the hand, and led him on unresistingly.

'I am here, Nawab,' said the old man as he entered the private room. 'What wouldst thou with me?' The bright lamp-light glanced from the chain-mail and steel helmet and gauntlets which the chief wore; his heavy sabre, with its richly inlaid handle, was in his hand. Juma the negro, who stood behind his master, thought, perhaps, that it was not so easy to slay him as a sheep.

'We are friends, Noor Khan,' said the Nawab. 'Thou hast nothing to complain of—hast thou?'

'Nothing,' said the chief, 'but an idle life. I would rouse my lord to action, and Afghans have no such dainty words for thee as these traitor Bengalees. The Feringis are taking thy country—wilt thou not strike a blow for it? Awake, my lord! there are a thousand of my people without, who took Calcutta once, and will take it again. Be not afraid; she is hostage for us.'

Speak but a few words to them, and Noor Khan will answer for every man.'

'I dare not face them,' said the Nawab; 'If they knew—'

'I have told them all, my lord,' said Sozun, rising—she had sunk down, weak and exhausted; 'my father knows all, and has again saved me from death.'

'Poor child!—poor child!' said the Khan, stroking her head kindly; 'henceforth devoted to God, who would harm thee? Yes, my lord, she will be safe with us. Come, speak to them from the window—come, delay may be unwise, and my people are not safe in delays; tell them they will march to-morrow for Calcutta, and they will be satisfied. Come—listen; they are impatient children, whom a kind word satisfies.'

The eunuch advanced, and threw open the casement. The courtyard now blazed with torches, and the barrels of a thousand matchlocks glinted in the bright light, as men surged forward with a strange clamour, shouting; but all were silent when their leader and the Nawab appeared, and a few words, which told them they would march next day, as the advanced guard of the army, were answered by the same rude shouts and cries.

'Take them away, Khan Sahib,' said the Nawab; 'I like them not in their present humour, and I am weary, and would sleep.'

'Let us depart, Sozun,' said the old man. 'Come, this is no place for thee,' he added, in their own tongue; 'I much mistrust yonder savage. Come, else the Prince is not safe—they would not go hence without thee or me.'

'What dost thou say to her?' cried the Nawab, suspiciously.

'That she is safest with me, and my lord without her,' he replied, respectfully but firmly. 'Those without would not leave her with thee now, and I would not answer for them if we were delayed. Go thou before, Sozun; I will follow thee.'

'I shall not see thee again, Sozun,' said the Nawab, sadly. 'Is it thus thou leavest me—alone!'

Sozun thought she saw tears upon his face glistening in the torchlight, and it might have been so; the tone of

his voice, too, touched her, but there could be no hesitation now. 'My lord will see his poor slave often,' she said, humbly bowing herself to the ground; 'she cannot forget—many benefits. She will be with her father and the Lord; but whenever there may be a service done in truth and faith for her Prince, Sozun will not fail, even to death.'

'Let me drive my dagger through his back,' whispered the giant, 'now, as he goes down the stair. That he should take her away, even from thy presence, O my lord!'

'No, no, let them go,' was the reply; 'I dare not now, they would tear me in pieces—listen!'

The hoarse roar of the men below had arisen again as they welcomed their chief and the girl he led by the hand; and, placing them in the midst, they moved on singing the war-cry, which, with the hollow tramp of a thousand feet through the streets at that hour, sounded wild and strange in the ears of peaceful citizens, and gradually died away in the distance. There was a report next day that during the night the Afghans had mutinied for pay; and when the treasury was opened early, and the troops, receiving heavy donations, began to march southwards, it was known that the second campaign against the English had begun.

'Thou wilt remain here, Juma,' said the Nawab, as his slave fell to rubbing his feet as he lay down to rest. It was then that their most confidential communications were interchanged.

'What have I to do, my lord?'

'I had thought of taking the lady with me,' he replied, 'but she is better here; when I am gone, do thou lead her below—she is safest there.'

'Good, my lord. What more? my Prince will be fortunate, and capture others!'

'If I am, Juma,' he cried, rising up, and striking the pillow savagely, 'it is not Feringis, curse them all! that I shall bring back, but that girl from her clansmen. Let them but perish under the Feringi fire; and were she a thousand times a devotee, she shall be mine again.'

‘ Can my lord trust her with him ? ’ asked the eunuch, with a sneer.

‘ To death—to death ! ’ he cried ; ‘ the truest heart that ever beat for me ; but I was mad, and have lost her, and am alone, for how long—O Allah ! how long ? ’ and so, raving and dozing in uneasy sleep by turns, the Nawab lay, and the negro watched.

CHAPTER XIX

THE NAWAB AGAIN AT CALCUTTA

1. Clive's Preparations

SURAJ-OO-DOULAH was in no mood to listen to proposals which, modified as they were, still presented many points of humiliation. Colonel Clive's messengers were dismissed angrily, and the native army marched on unopposed, and without delays reached Calcutta on the 3rd of February. The English flag was flying over the Old Fort, which was not changed ; but the noble ships lying quietly at their anchorage, with double tiers of guns projecting from their sides ; the white tents of, as it appeared, a considerable army, and the new fortifications, were very different objects from the few merchant ships which had dropped away from the Fort before, and the miserable garrison of weak Europeans and Portuguese which had in vain striven to defend it. The army, however, had suffered no check, and the defiant attitude of the English only excited them the more as they pressed into the suburbs of Calcutta, and with more than ordinary military skill took up positions by which all supplies to the English would be intercepted ; and when in the afternoon a deputation from the gentlemen of the Factory waited upon the Nawab with remonstrances, and requests to withdraw, they met with a haughty refusal, and returned. Ralph Smithson heard with enthusiasm, common to all who were to take a part in it, that the native camp was to be attacked that night, and rejoiced that one more

opportunity would be afforded him for earning the distinction he had more than ever grown to covet. Heretofore, what he had done, what he had been able to do, had been more the result of accident than design ; but that was all changed. He had no military rank, it was true ; but a volunteer such as he was, was too valuable to be overlooked, and his request to be actively employed met with an instant and flattering acceptance.

‘ Of course, my dear boy—of course. You didn’t think I should leave you out, did you ? ’ said Mr. Clive, as the various officers to be engaged had received their instructions, and had left him to make the necessary preparations. ‘ You know the ground, Ralph ? ’

‘ Every yard of it, sir, for miles round the town. I can lead the column anywhere you please. I have not been idle all day, and have been watching the enemy as their troops took up positions, and thought them secure ones.’

‘ And you have seen their guns, Ralph—what are they ? ’

‘ I know where they are to a yard, sir ; but what they are I cannot tell you. They seem, however, to be a strong battery, with some heavy pieces.’

‘ Then you must take us at once upon them. If we can spike the whole of them—and we must do it—there is no fear for the rest. A native army which has lost its guns is at best a disorderly rabble. But do you know the troops ? Are there any of your blue-coated friends among them ? ’

‘ They are with the guns, sir ; and they are the only fellows you need care about,’ was the reply. ‘ They will fight, too, if they are led as they were before by that girl.’

‘ What girl, Ralph ? What ! A woman in the enemy’s camp ? ’

‘ I don’t know, sir. There are curious stories abroad about her. Some say she’s a favourite of the Nawab’s, whom he sends on any desperate service because of some prophecy about her that she is to take Calcutta ; others that she is a prophetess of the tribe—Afghans, sir, they call them, or Rohillas—who leads them with a marvellous bravery. Once—’

‘ Once, Ralph ? Speak out, man. Why do you hesitate ? ’

'It does not matter now, sir,' he replied; 'but I have seen her as I never wish to see her again, brave as she was, and I hope I may not meet her to-night, that's all.'

I think it crossed Colonel Clive's mind for a moment that his young friend might have been beguiled into some strange love affair with the native prophetess, or whatever she might be; but it was dismissed in a moment. There was no tender expression on Ralph Smithson's face; on the contrary, a knitting of the brow and a quivering of the nostril and lip, which told of other scenes than love.

'I will tell you, sir, perhaps, some day how it was,' continued Ralph, after a pause; 'I never hear of her that I do not associate that poor creature Julia Wharton with her; and I am certain if ever we hear aught of *her*, it will be through this girl. I should not have thought of her, but my servant, who is an excellent spy, hath been through the camp all day, and told me he was sure he had seen the girl among the Rohillas, crying to them wildly, pointing to the Fort, and beating her breast.'

'Phe-e-ew,' whistled the Colonel; 'then we shall have those fellows at us first, and so much the better. If they are the stay of the Nawab's army, the more they are cut up the better. Now I remember, the worst charges I have ever seen by Indian soldiers, have been when some mad or drunken fakeer led them on shouting an incantation, or whatever it might be; and I had to kill such a fellow once myself on the breach at Arcot. Bah! A devil, sir, by Jove! But a girl? well, I only hope I may not come across her, that's all—nor you either.'

'I hope not, sir. Now, if you will tell me what to do, I will go and see after the men.'

'Nothing but what I told you, Ralph: lead us right at the guns; we shall catch the fellows asleep, I daresay; if not, we must make the best of it. Just before we start, I shall call for volunteers of both the services for you; I daresay you will have a hundred, and well do I know "Ralph Darnell" will not disappoint me. Go, get some sleep yourself. If you are ready by three in the morning it will do. I shall turn in myself, for people's.

heads and bodies can't be too fresh for such matters. Is there anything I can do, Ralph, in case—?’

‘No, sir, nothing ; all my papers are in my desk, and those affairs were arranged long ago.’

‘So much the better—I am glad to hear it,’ was the reply, and for the time they parted.

2. *The Reconnoitre*

Ralph Smithson could not, however, sleep. Suppose the Afghan girl were to urge her clansmen to attempt a night attack—it was said to be a favourite mode of Rohilla warfare—and lead the men, as she had done before, with reckless bravery, much confusion might be the result. His servant met him at his tent, and pressed him to take rest, but he would not. ‘Come with me, Cassim,’ he said ; ‘we will go forward and see if all be quiet. And you saw her in the camp?’

‘I am sure it was she,’ he said—‘the same face, fair and ruddy—I could not mistake it. She is a fakeer, sir, now ; for I saw a green turban on her head, and a green dress, and strings of beads about her neck. She was standing on a gun-carriage, preaching in the Rohilla tongue to her people, and though I could not understand a word, I could see what she meant ; and when she had done, the men gathered wildly about her and kissed her feet.’

Strange and mysterious creature, thought Ralph Smithson, as the old scene came back on his memory : the wild fight, her attitude over the dead, her evident anxiety in regard to the concealment of Julia Wharton, and her disappearance behind the Nawab’s palankeen—who and what could she be ? The customs of natives of India were little known at that period, and the wildest stories of magic and paganism were readily believed. Could she be one of these strange magicians ? He sat down on his camp-chair outside the tent, and, as he lit a pipe, fell to thinking. ‘Cassim,’ he cried at length, ‘couldst thou lead me to the place now ?’

Cassim was a wiry little Madras Mussulman, who had been taken into Ralph Smithson’s service before he went to Madras, and had returned thence with him. Very

different in character was he from the timid, lazy, Bengali servants who attended the Factory. Half servant, half soldier, had he not been too short altogether, he would now have been bearing a musket among Colonel Clive's Sepoys, in whose regiment he had been born. He looked at his master from head to foot, as if to see whether he were sober or not.

'Do you wish it, sir? there may be danger,' he said.

'Not if we are careful, I think. Come, perhaps I know the way myself, but we had best be sure.'

'Tie this scarf round your head, and throw my black blanket over your head, sir, and there will be no danger; but as you are, with that hat, we should be known. Let me tie it.'

Cassim's waistband became an excellent turban, and the black blanket covered as much of Ralph Smithson's figure as was needful. 'That is good, sir,' said Cassim; 'no one could know you in the dark, only you are so tall and I so little. Come, we shall see some fun perhaps, and if we have to fight, I can use a sword as well as you.'

So they went on. There was no moon, but the stars shone very bright and clear, and their light sufficed to show the ground clearly, which was wet with the heavy dew. The night was very cold, almost frosty, and in the native camps men had lighted fires, the smoke of which hung low in the air, and was bright from the blaze beneath them. It seemed like a canopy of cloud stretching in a semicircle round the back of the city, and marked the place where the Nawab's troops rested. Cassim led on without speaking a word, past some purlieus of the native town, where nothing was stirring but dogs and jackals prowling about. On the side of the British camp all was still; a lantern here and there tied in a ship's rigging, or a lamp in the stern of a native boat, was the only sign of life. In the native camp there was an endless drumming and blowing of horns and trumpets; but this ceased suddenly, and all was quiet.

'The Nawab is gone to sleep,' said Cassim—'tired, perhaps. I know the way to his tent, too, sir.'

'Don't talk,' replied his master. 'Get on fast—it is farther than I thought.'

'We can get round the corner right upon them presently,' said the servant, 'if you like to be near them.'

'As near as you can,' was the reply in a whisper; and as Cassim began to crawl on his hands and knees through some low bushes, Ralph Smithson did the same. It was not unlike some of the old night-work at Melcepeth, long ago! And as they reached the edge of the fringe of bushes, the whole scene before them was strikingly beautiful.

Stretched over the flat plain, here and there broken by date-palms and bushes, were the innumerable tents of the host. Some, large pavilions, enclosed in outer walls of cotton canvas; others of more humble pretensions, which sheltered a few soldiers; while a few spears, or poles, or matchlocks tied together, and a sheet or carpet thrown over them, protected the sleepers from the heavy dew. Here and there were groups of elephants snorting and blowing as they munched the succulent bulrushes cut for them during the day or threw trunkfuls of water over their backs; gentle tinklings of camel bells, and an occasional hoarse low of draught oxen, mingled with other sounds, the hum of voices, and the thousand undistinguishable murmurs of an immense mass of people: but it was on the scene immediately in their front, and hardly fifty yards distant, that the attention of Ralph Smithson was instantly riveted.

Before him were the heavy guns and their clumsy carriages and tumbrils, ranged in a long row, apparently ready for action; a slight trench had been begun before them, but discontinued; the white oxen which had dragged them, and some elephants, were tethered in the rear, and little screens of carpets and sheets had been made over the guns to shelter men who slept beneath them. Before the battery were a number of the Afghans sitting round a huge fire, which sent up crackling flames as dry thorns were thrown on it, and one of the men was singing in a strong rough voice, while another beat a small hand-drum in time with the song. Presently it ceased, and there was a hurried consultation among them, and some laughter, and several of the men went away; while more faggots were thrown on the fire, and

a merry blaze went high into the air, lighting up every bronzed bearded face, and sparkling on helmet and matchlock. Then those who had gone returned, leading a slight figure in a green-coloured tunic and turban, and a heavy necklace of wooden beads about its shoulders, holding a small lute in its hands. Those about the fire made way for it respectfully, some stooping down to touch its feet, while others spread a saddle-cloth or carpet to which it was led. There was no doubt now, for the firelight was full and clear, and the Afghan girl was before him. She struck a few notes as a prelude, and one of the richest female voices to which he had ever listened, began to sing a low but plaintive ditty, which had an inexpressible charm ; some of her audience wept, and some flung their arms wildly about. When she changed the melody to what seemed a song of war, the excitement was irrepressible—naked swords flashed in the light, and some of the men rose, clashed their shields, and made fierce gyrations, as if fighting. Then, as a softer strain followed, the wild listeners sank down, hung their heads, and seemed to weep.

‘Come, sir, we are too long here,’ said Cassim,—
‘Come away.’

Ralph Smithson could have sat there for hours, but delay was impossible ; never afterwards did he forget the mellow voice, the wild melodies of that strange music, which, with the tinkling of the little lute, grew fainter and fainter as he retraced his steps. Yes, he could now lead on his volunteers without fail : but who was she ?

Ah ! he would soon know.

CHAPTER XX

THE ATTACK—FEBRUARY 3, 1757

1. Left for Dead

THE noise in the native camp gradually died away, and the bright line of smoke canopy which had hung low over it, had altogether paled, or was mingling with the heavy grey fog which, as the night advanced, rose from

the river and spread over the plain and town ; now and then, whenever dry thorns and faggots were thrown upon watchfires, a light glimmered in the sky for a brief space, and again faded into gloom ; but these were few, and the quiet which prevailed proved that, for the most part, the Nawab's great army slept.

Forty thousand stout soldiers, not wanting in individual courage, and of such temper as those of whom the victorious native armies of England have since been made, and have proved invincible among their countrymen—well provided with artillery, well paid, well fed, well armed, after their own fashion, with sabre and shield, matchlock and spear, deadly weapons in stout hands ; horse and foot, there were they, forty thousand men : while advancing on this perilous enterprise against them were not more than a thousand English soldiers and sailors, with a few others to carry powder and ball, and drag field-pieces, for carriages there were none—slender means, one would think, to win a victory. And yet I believe that, from the gallant gentleman who, as the night was advancing to its close, dressed himself carefully, then knelt down and prayed God to help the cause of his country—committing also one very dear to His care—to the meanest soldier or sailor among whom he went from rank to rank, saying a few cheering words, there was not one then present who did not believe himself to be a host, and looked upon the work to be done as a mere morning's amusement. I do not think that one feeling of the risk of failure ever entered the mind of any one ; and yet, if there had been a check, Messieurs the French at Chandernagore would have been ready enough to give up their proffered neutrality ; and between them and the Nawab's army, Mr. Clive might have fared badly enough.

But Mr. Clive had no such apprehension ; and when he went with Ralph Smithson, Major Kilpatrick, Mr. Coote, Mr. Rumbold, and other officers, to the head of the column, warned the men against straggling, and then called out in a cheery voice, ' Volunteers for an advanced guard ! ' I think the whole column was stirred, and would have rushed towards him, had not stern discipline

forbidden any such movement. As it was, of soldiers and sailors, nearly a hundred men had recovered arms, and, under officers of their own services, were given over to Ralph Smithson to lead; and with a muffled but hearty cheer, the intrepid band set out.

The fog had now thickened much, and, besides being dank and wet, had settled down low to the earth, and but little could be seen of anything around. The men's voices even were muffled by it, and indeed few cared to speak with a mighty combat before them, to which they were fast advancing, and absolute silence had been enjoined on all. So there was only heard the tramp of the men, the faint rumbling of the gun wheels, as the sailors, holding the dragropes, pulled them along, and low whisperings here and there between comrades. Had not, perhaps, the faithful little Cassim, now accoutred for fight with a sword and shield, stridden by his master, even Ralph Smithson might have been puzzled to lead the column as he had desired; but Cassim's instinct and keen perception of the localities proved of eminent use; and as the dawn was breaking, and objects began to be seen looming large and indistinct in the thick haze, the column reached the bushes whence, only a few hours before, Ralph Smithson and his companion had looked upon the scene which has already been described. As it proved afterwards, it was not the point desired by Mr. Clive, but there was no hesitation now.

'This is the place, sir,' said Ralph Smithson, in a whisper; 'there are the guns—we have them, for no one stirs.' Indeed there was a quiet stillness then all over the camp, and except a few indistinct murmurs, there were no signs of the vast host before them.

'Spike every gun, my men!' cried Mr. Clive; 'and now, On, gentlemen! charge in the King's name! Hurrah!' Then the force sprang on with a ringing cheer, and the grim work of death began. The foremost files of the 39th were among the Rohillas ere the sleeping forms could well arouse themselves, or comprehend what had occurred; and though many fell by bayonet and cutlass, yet others rallied; and their old chief's voice, and one which thrilled through Ralph

Smithson's heart, as he pressed on striking down those who opposed him, were clearly heard above the din and clamour which now arose on all sides. If he could only capture her! But little could be distinguished; and now, increased by the smoke of the Nawab's guns, which were being wildly fired, the fog seemed to grow thicker and thicker. Again and again was the woman's shrill cry heard, and as Ralph Smithson, followed by a party of men, dashed after it among the guns, hewing down the artillerymen and spiking the pieces, he felt, from whom he could not see, a rain of heavy blows descend on his ill-protected head and shoulders, and at the same time a sharp stinging pain in his leg, and, staggering on a few paces, he fell to the earth insensible.

Ralph Smithson's fall had not been noticed; for the little Cassim, missing him in the *mêlée*, had attached himself to Colonel Clive, and as the first obstacle was passed, he cried in English which could be well understood, 'I know Nawab's tent—come on—come on!' and so the column, dealing death as it went, and producing the wildest confusion, whirled onwards.

For some time—how long he knew not, but it was now broad daylight, and the sun's pale beams were struggling through the mist—Ralph Smithson's swoon continued. When he became conscious, and tried to raise himself up, his head was dizzy and confused, and his face covered with blood; and when he strove to move his wounded leg and arm, which were exquisitely painful, he utterly failed to rise, and again fell back. 'Oh for a cup of water!' he thought, and could have cried out, but who could have heard around him? The silence was almost that of death, and except an occasional groan from a dying soldier, there was no sign of life. The oxen had broken their tethers and had scampered off, elephants had disappeared, and there was nothing left but the black guns, through which wreaths of heavy mist were sweeping before the slight morning breeze, and the dead lying among them, as it seemed to be, in heaps; blue-coated men, with faces almost as fair as the English soldiers and sailors who had died with them. Away in the distance, the clamour of war, the roar of

men's voices, musketry, and occasional cannon-shots, were heard confusedly. 'They have left me to die,' groaned the poor fellow in his misery. 'Oh that I were with them! Oh that some one might return to help me!' but indeed he was conscious of very little, and, exhausted by loss of blood and the pain of his wounds, he sank back again into insensibility.

When he woke, it was from excess of pain. He felt some rough hands dragging him by the hurt arm from under the gun-wheel, against which he had fallen, and, as a momentary consciousness returned, it was only, as he thought, to breathe an incoherent prayer ere he died. Several of the Rohillas were standing over him, and one of them had raised a long, dull, keen-edged knife to despatch him; but ere it could be used, he heard the shrill scream of a woman, who bounded to his side, and, seizing the arm of the man who held the knife, wrested it from him, and flung it away.

'It is he!' she cried—'the Feringi who spared me; I knew he was here, and ye shall none of ye harm him. He is mine!' and she sat down by Ralph Smithson and strove to raise his head, at the same time pouring some water from a long-necked gourd into his mouth, and wiping away the blood about his eyes with her scarf.

'He shall not live!' cried another of the men, advancing with a fierce gesture; 'the Feringis have slain hundreds of our brothers, and he must die. Away with ye, Sozun! this is no place for the like of thee. Go!—leave men to men.'

'I go not, Ahmed,' she said, calmly; 'I owe this poor life to him, as thou knowest. Dost thou not remember the youth? Look! He spared us both.'

'By Allah and the Prophet! it's the same,' exclaimed the man. 'Yes, he spared thee, and he should be a brother to us. Stay, some of you, and help,' he cried aloud. Other men were now crowding up, and those of their comrades who still breathed were being rapidly carried off by twos and threes together, and thus several men came to the place.

'Dost thou understand me well?' asked Sozun of Ralph; 'fear not, thou art with friends, and art safe.'

O Allah, most merciful ! can I repay that debt ? Drink more water, sir ; there—plenty—as much as thou canst ; or hast thou any of the Feringi wine with thee ? ’

Ralph remembered his flask full of generous Madeira, which Cassim had filled, and insisted on his putting in his pocket. ‘ It is here,’ he said, faintly, and Sozun took it out, and held it to his lips. How grateful it was ! How that first mouthful seemed to send the blood once more coursing through his veins. He tried even to sit up, but Sozun would not permit him.

‘ Shabash ! ’ cried the Rohilla—‘ well done !—that’s what makes the Feringis so valiant : now, lady, lift him up ; let me carry him.’

‘ Not so,’ said the girl—‘ make a litter for him ; he is very badly hurt.’

In a few moments two loading-rods were fastened to the ends of a coarse black blanket, and Ahmed and others advanced to take him up. It was in vain that Ralph tried to resist, and appealed to his protectress ; she would not hear him.

‘ You would have died in an hour, when the sun came upon your head ; be thankful to God who sent me to your aid, as I am that I found you. You are safe with us, O Feringi, and Noor Khan will be a father to you, as he is to me. Take him up,’ she continued to the men, ‘ and do not shake him as ye go.’

Her orders were instantly obeyed. Utterly helpless as he was, Ralph was in no condition to resist, and felt himself carried at a swift pace through the almost deserted camp, the fair Afghan girl walking and running by his side, cheering him with friendly assurances.

2. *In Sozun’s Care*

All this time Mr. Clive had fought his way through the camp. The fog had misled him ; and, as it cleared away, he found himself opposed to a fresh body of the Rohillas, and men of Oude and Behar, and for a time the fight was doubtful. How Mr. Clive himself escaped that day he knew not ; but, though losing two guns, and upwards of two hundred of his small force, he had attained his object. The Nawab himself was soon in precipitate flight ; and

his army, lacking spirit to turn on the little English battalion, hurried after him, so Calcutta was once more free! But Ralph Smithson, with many another brave fellow, was missing; and though the whole plain, the place of the first charge, the track across the camp, and wherever the fighting had been sharpest, were thoroughly searched by parties who went for the dead, and by the distracted Cassim, no trace could be found of his body. It seemed little likely that one Englishman would be carried off, when so many wounded men had been unmolested. 'My poor Ralph,' thought the Colonel, 'now all your life's trouble is ended, and at last there's no heir to Melcepeth Castle, or to the bank. Ah! they will grieve bitterly and unavailingly now, but none more keenly than I—not one. What can I write to Roger Darnell? Well, thank God! I can say that Ralph died, as I hope to die, doing his duty.'

I may here remark, and with great truth, that the loss of the poor fellow was deeply felt by all his friends; and it was noticed that, for many days, Mr. Clive was moody and restless, refusing society, and sending men and spies in every possible direction in hope of news of his young friend; but none came. And if any ship had been going to England, he would have written to Roger Darnell that his nephew had died in the fight of the 3rd February.

But we know very well that Ralph was not dead, though sorely hurt—very sorely indeed. When the men set him down, he had a very confused notion of where he was; but under the care applied to him, he was soon partially relieved. The place he had been taken to was a village a few miles from Calcutta, which formed one of the new outposts of the Nawab's army, held by the Rohillas. For shelter, there was a shed near a Mahomedan cemetery, overshadowed by a huge banyan-tree, in which, upon a village bed covered by a soft mattress, and over him a padded quilt, he rested easily. Old Noor Khan, and those who remained of the clan, had assembled by evening, and Ralph was an object of great curiosity and interest to them all. Among men used to a warlike life, the dressing of wounds was an easy task; and there was a native surgeon attached to them who took Ralph

in hand, cut a bullet out of his left leg, which had not gone quite through, sewed up a heavy sabre wound in his neck and shoulder, fomented the bruises on his head, and set his right arm, which had been fractured. Ralph remembered how he had been suddenly beset by several men, and beaten down ; and it seemed only wonderful how he had escaped with life.

Day and night the girl watched by him, or only left him for her place to be taken by one of the men. She rarely spoke to him, and allowed none to do so. Perhaps for a time he was delirious, for he was conscious of much fever ; but the cooling drinks given to him, and skilful treatment, could not fail of acting upon a constitution naturally hardy and vigorous. With the English camp it was impossible to communicate. He passed for an Afghan ; for his English clothes were removed, and the blue dress of the tribe was given to him. When the Nawab's camp moved on, he was carried in a litter, and he supposed he should be taken to the capital. He had no power to write. Peace, they told him, was concluded ; the English were to return to Cossim Bazar ; Mr. Watts was to be re-established as agent, and if he arrived there, a return to the fleet could be easily managed. Under these circumstances, therefore, we may believe that Ralph Smithson gave himself up to the luxury of getting well ; and it would have been unnatural if the affectionate care of the strange and beautiful Afghan girl had not been returned with an increasing interest.

For many days she would not allow him to speak ; but when the fever was past—when, lifted from his bed, he was allowed to recline on soft cushions, and could even sit up—the girl sang to him, amused him with tales, and though he could not frequently follow all her rapid speech, ordinary conversation was easily understood and replied to. From time to time Ralph strove to lead her to speak of Julia Wharton, but the topic was evaded when others were present, or only the general report, that she had been carried away, admitted.

One day, however, they were alone. His bed had been laid under the shadow of a mango-tree, in a grove where the men were encamped, and in the heat of

noon all were asleep. Sozun had been singing one of her low crooning songs to her little lute, and he had been listening dreamily, but could not sleep.

'Listen, said she, I could not tell thee before, but no one is near us now, and I will tell my own story and hers, whom I tried to save and failed.' And it was with a vivid interest that he followed her strange narrative of Julia Wharton's fate.

'Cannot we save her, Sozun,' he asked, when he heard all, 'when we arrive there, and I am strong and well?'

'I fear not,' replied Sozun. 'Had Nasir been at his post, we might have depended upon him; but he, too, is in irons, and there is no hope of him. When thy people make another treaty, let them demand her, and hide her shame; but even in this there must be care. Thou dost not know him, sir; he might tell Juma to kill her rather than give her up. But what is her life to thee? Didst thou love her? She is very beautiful.

'Never, but as a sister,' he answered, 'whom I would rescue from shame and misery.'

'Yes, hereafter thou mayst save her, but not now. Meanwhile she is well, with one of the most precious of God's creatures, the Begum, whom she will grow to love, and who will care more for the poor Feringi woman than she did for me, her enemy. And yet,' she continued, with enthusiasm, 'when he put me in irons, and sent me to share her lonely life, I was a shameless wanton with a hardened heart, and now I bless Allah that he hath permitted one such as I to do his service. Ah, sir, such a one as that angel should be thy wife—so pure, so beautiful, and so gentle. Listen! that coward Prince's good destiny was but for a year; the Derwish said so by the planets, and he was right. Now men begin to say that the destiny of your people will follow his without a check, and that of all Hind ye will be the kings. His power is already on the wane. Many are discontented. Even my own people talk of a service without honour, and would go elsewhere. Wait till the year of the Derwish is past, and she may be thine. I, Sozun, would give her to thee. Dost thou believe in the planets—in destiny i'

‘No,’ replied Ralph, smiling; ‘our people think prophecies by the stars foolishness; but they believe in the will of God, and that is why I am here.’

‘It is the same—the same!’ cried the girl, wildly, clapping her hands; ‘I could tell thee—but not yet—not yet! Wait, and thou wilt believe, even as I do, when the end comes.’

CHAPTER XXI

FREE !

1. Sozun Revisits the Capital

VERY often, when they were together, Ralph strove to lead Sozun to the subject of the Nawab, but in vain. She had been his slave, was still his slave, and her life was his sacrifice, she would say. She might be able to help him even now if he would respect her vow; but it was evident she dared not trust him, and seeing that she only wept when he was mentioned, Ralph ceased to urge her on the subject. But, knowing how valuable information would be to Mr. Clive, he encouraged talk by others, and, to say the truth, heard a good deal of the general discontent, of the possibility of revolution, but above all, of the strange new prophecy about the English of which he was often told. The people among whom he was, were, if anything, because more ignorant, more superstitious than others. Yet there were some who read the Koran, and one in particular, whom men consulted for lucky days, who performed priestly offices, and marshalled them at prayers. He had heard of the astrological combinations, and, after his rude fashion, tested them himself, and told Ralph they all believed the Feringis would be kings soon; and indeed everywhere the hundred years to come of Feringi rule were ringing through the land.

Once, too, Sozun accompanied the chief to the capital. ‘He will die,’ she said. ‘My master must die when his time comes, but I will see him before then. I cannot help him; his fate is in the Lord’s hands; but I can at

least see him and kiss his feet. Let me go,' she said to Ralph, who in vain tried to dissuade her; 'I am in no danger with my people, and I will bring thee news of Julia.' It was an easy name to pronounce, and Sozun had learned it—and she went.

She was long away—more than a month, and Ralph Smithson had passed a weary time without her. He was now recovering fast; the wounds were healing kindly, and his strength was recovering in spite of the hot weather; but it was a dreary time nevertheless, and he sadly missed the pleasant companionship, the unceasing, untiring attendance, and the bright beauty of the girl. There was no strain on his mind when she was with him; and the perpetual and gentle ministering to his wants, without effort or officious zeal—the almost instinctive anticipation of every wish—had been hard to part with, and was gratefully remembered; and when he saw her dear bright face again, he was overjoyed and thankful.

She had much to tell him, for she had seen Julia. In one of the moments of the Nawab's caprice, Nasir, the eunuch, often threatened with death, had been released, and in his stead Juma was imprisoned. She had made herself known to Nasir, and, having disguised herself, had been taken to the underground apartments, and had seen Julia.

'They are happy,' she said, 'she and my beloved mistress. Julia is very pale, like a lily, for no sun reaches her, and but little light; yet she is cool there this hot weather, and reads her book, in which are the words of the holy Jesus. Look, she wrote a verse which I have kept as a talisman. I shall ever keep it, and here it is; tell me what it means. She could not translate it, nor could Anna.'

Ralph Smithson opened the paper wonderingly. It was a fly-leaf torn from her prayer-book, and the writing was stiff and cramped, but here is what was written:—

'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that now goeth on his way weeping, and beareth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy.'

'She said you would not have forgotten the verses. What are they?'

‘Nor have I,’ said Ralph. ‘They are like a blessed message from heaven. Listen to what they mean. Canst thou remember them?’

‘Surely—do I not remember a hundred songs of which I do not understand a word? Teach me these words daily, and I will learn them. Not as a parrot, Ralph,’ she added, smiling—‘I know the meaning—but with my heart. Yes; she is quiet and happy, and looks only for deliverance when God wills it. I told her of you, and she knows you will deliver her, and all she could send you was this.’

It was a lock of her brown glossy hair. ‘And Anna,’ continued Sozun, ‘told me her love went with it. Dost thou love her, then? Once—’

‘Once I said she was my sister, and you believed me, Sozun,’ he replied. ‘I say it again, and need not swear it.’

‘I do believe thee; and hadst thou seen them both as they sat together on the bed when I left, and the sun’s rays were shining through the little window just before it set—the only time it can shine there, as well I know—when the glory of the light shone around her head like the crown of a houri of Paradise—of the two thou wouldst have chosen my dear mistress. I have told her where thou art, for we are faithful, we three women—one in heart and mind—and of those who have sown in tears, and hope to reap in joy. . . . His destiny? It draweth nigh, Ralph, very nigh. How it is to be accomplished who can tell? I went to the durbar as one of the soldiers with Noor Khan, with my head and face tied up. Had he been a man I would have stayed and kissed his feet. I saw only a thing with rolling bloodshot eyes, supported in his seat by others, slaving, cursing, and drinking. Ah, sir! it was a sore sight, and I could not bear it. Then I asked Nasir to take me at night to him, with my holy vestment on, which all men venerate, for they are my grave-clothes, but he refused. ‘Dost thou again wish to be as thou used to be?’ he said. ‘Hath he not sworn to carry thee off? and would he respect these garments for a moment? Tell Noor Khan to beware! If he were dead, he thinks he dare attack thy people, or

they would not care for thee, and he could once more buy thee for money ; but no one cares to harm the old man, and Allah protects thee !' All this, and more, he told me. Ah, Ralph ! it is hideous altogether—and this is one whom I have caressed and loved—ay, whom I love still, and, if it would save him, would give my life for. It were better we were all gone hence. My countrymen, the Abdallees, they say, are advancing from Delhi, and whether we go to meet them or remain here to receive them, is all that has to be decided. I heard that the army is assembling on the river to meet your people ; but he dare not trust mine, and what will he do without them ? Now we have spoken long, and thou art weary ; and I have not seen the wounds, nor seen thee walk, O dear brother ! and they tell me thou art strong.'

'Stronger indeed, Sozun—look ;' and he rose up. 'I can walk as well as ever, and my leg healed at once after the cloth came out of the wound. My arm is weak and numb yet, but they rub it daily, and it is getting strong. I shall soon be well again—quite well. Why should I not go to Mr. Watts, at the Factory ? I can ride—'

'Art thou weary of us, Ralph ?' she said, bursting into tears. 'But forgive me ; when they think it right to send thee, Sozun will not weep—no, not a tear. What must be done, must be done—and thou wilt not forget me—never ?'

Ralph Smithson never said a truer word, I think, than when, a few days afterwards, he held her to his heart, for he would not be denied this, and, kissing her fervently on the forehead, told her he could not forget, nor even repay her affection, so strange, so true, and so disinterested.

'It is not the last time,' she said, almost gaily. 'Something tells me that we shall meet again, and then it will be the last time. Go in peace now, and the blessing of the Lord and His prophet, and of Jesus and His holy Mother, be upon thee and thine.'

2. *Ralph's Return*

A few days' travel by night, escorted by a party of the faithful fellows who had so long tended him, brought

Ralph Smithson to the Factory at Cossim Bazaar ; and as his servants announced to Mr. Watts the arrival of an English gentleman—for Ralph had put on his English clothes under a tree as he neared his destination—that worthy individual threw on a dressing-gown, and hurried out to receive him. ‘Some one Mr. Clive has sent, no doubt,’ he said to himself. ‘He would not trust to letters. Who can it be?’ And I think that Mr. Watts hardly believed the evidence of his senses when Ralph Smithson advanced towards him and said—

‘Have you forgotten me, Mr. Watts? I am one you used to know—Ralph Smithson.’

‘Mr. Smithson!—God bless my soul, Ralph Smithson in life! We have mourned you dead, sir, long since. Where have you been all this time, without a word to any of us? Ah! this will be joyful news to Mr. Clive—very joyful indeed!—for he hath not been himself since you left. Come, rest yourself. I have much to hear, I think, and of strange interest; and who are these?’

‘The good fellows to whom, under Providence, I owe my life and recovery from some desperate wounds, sir. And I shall need to draw upon you, for they must not go away empty-handed.’

‘As much as you please, sir. It will be paid right joyfully. Let me but order them what they require, and I will rejoin you directly. Go in and lie down. Even now I see you are limping.’

‘My leg is stiff riding a long march,’ said Ralph, ‘but it will soon recover. I am quite well now, and my wounds healed.’

Well, indeed! for he looked strong and rosy as ever, but he was thin and gaunt, and disguised by a bushy beard; and as he lay down on the comfortable sofa in Mr. Watts’ sitting-room, he felt a sense of quiet security to which he had long been a stranger, and from his heart thanked God for it.

‘And you have heard no news, Mr. Smithson? nothing of what your friend Mr. Clive hath been doing? Strange that even native reports should not have reached you!’ said Mr. Watts, as he returned.

'None,' replied Ralph. 'We have been at a distance, and the people I was with were only interested by the Nawab's doings. I suppose Mr. Clive is at Calcutta?'

'Ah, yes! I know,' said Mr. Watts quickly, 'the Nawab suspects these Rohillas, and has kept them out of the way; but I think we are sure of Noor Khan among the rest.'

'How do you mean, Mr. Watts?'

'Well, it is a long story, but one you must hear as soon as you are rested. Come in, put on some light clothes, and go to sleep; when you wake I will tell you all, for we are on the eve of a strange crisis, Mr. Smithson; but I will spare you now. Here is a cup of tea for you, of which you will be the better, I am sure.'

It was refreshing indeed; and when the sweet sleep which fell upon him, almost as his head touched the pillow, was ended, 'he arose,' as Mr. Watts said when he saw him again, 'a new man.'

And in the evening—when the Rohillas had been dismissed with a letter of true thanks to Noor Khan—which, inspired by the occasion, Mr. Watts' moonshee wrote in the choicest Persian—a loving message to Sozun, and their waistbands full of rupees, and they had all kissed Ralph's hands, and embraced him after their homely but affectionate manner—Mr. Watts told Ralph Smithson the story of the English progress after the affair before Calcutta and the Nawab's retreat.

'We could not trust the Nawab,' he said, 'as you very well know, Mr. Smithson; but danger seemed imminent, and Mr. Clive thought us too weak then to bring on a general action, which, indeed, the Admiral strongly urged him to fight; but Mr. Clive could see farther than the Admiral, and he was right, though some blamed him. No matter, sir: we made a treaty with Suraj-oo-Doulah; and as he promised compensation to the gentlemen of the Factory, and even an improvement on our old position, Mr. Drake and the others were quite satisfied. But Mr. Clive was not, sir—no, by Jove! nothing would satisfy him but routing the French out of Bengal; and he hath recently taken their Factory, sir—taken it gloriously. The gallant old Admiral took up the ships,

and though the land forces had done most part of the work, the army and the navy between them finished the matter, and on the 23rd of April, sir, the dear old flag was flying on Monsieur Crapaud's flagstaff !'

'This takes away my breath, Mr. Watts. What a glorious thing to do ! Oh that I had been with him !'

'I have no doubt Mr. Clive will be sorry that you were not, Mr. Smithson, and there's no helping that now ; but listen, there is much more to tell you. The people have long been discontented with this Nawab, and they wish for peace and quiet, which he will never give them. They desire to put him aside and set up another : we desire it too, sir, for we are as weary of all this uncertainty as they are, and there is no safety here but in that course. I myself am in no small danger from day to day. At one time I am flattered and praised, and the English are all in all. Then, sir, I am insulted and reproached, and threatened to be impaled. But I am not in that miscreant's power, Mr. Smithson, and if my life be of any use to my country, God, sir, will take care of it, as I humbly trust. One day the Nawab writes to the Emperor that he has destroyed the Feringis ; another, messengers go on to M. Bussy, who is in the Circars, to urge him to come on, and M. Law is with the Nawab, and urges this as a last chance for his country's superiority over us.

'But it won't do, sir—it won't do,' he continued, after having taken breath ; 'we have him fast, sir, for his troops are discontented, the bankers are discontented, his very eunuchs are discontented, and his poor wife, who hath many friends, is groaning in a dungeon. So we have determined, all of us, to raise Meer Jaffier, who married his sister, and is one of the Royal house, to the royal seat, and we only wait Mr. Clive's movement to effect it. Of ourselves, you see, we could do nothing ; but, with the army and the people on our side, we can, under God's help, assist them and ourselves at the same time, and attain a greater position than ever we had before. Our costly expenses and our losses will be paid, and there will be treasure enough to reward the army and the navy amply.'

'And when is this to be, Mr. Watts? Surely you are not safe—I had better remain with you?'

'Oh, I can take good care of myself,' was the stout reply; 'and my native friends, Juggut Seit and many others, will get me away when the time comes. No, sir, the Colonel will want you more than me; and I must send you off—this very night, too—if possible. You must take the despatches I have for him, and tell him to hurry on. He will be at Cutwah, I am sure, if he have not advanced. Meer Jaffier was to meet him there, but I fear he dare not take the plunge. It is we—it is Mr. Clive, sir, God bless him!—that must show the way. All I fear is, that Omichund—you remember him, Mr. Smithson—may betray us at last, as he hath often threatened, and would do to-morrow if he could get as much from the Nawab as he expects from us; but I think,' he added, with a wink, 'that Mr. Clive has satisfied him, though the deed he holds will prove to be so much waste paper. The old fox; he would serve us a scurvy trick, sir, if he could, and we can only check his rascality. 'Tis as pretty a game of chess, sir, as ever was played, and one that will be famous in history, I think; but Omichund risks too much, Mr. Smithson, for he knows that if he did cheat Mr. Clive he would be hung up as high as Haman. I am ready to start at a moment's notice: all the treasure and valuables have been sent on: but you must precede me and make the best of your way. I have promised the boatmen five hundred rupees if they take you safely, and thy'll do it. Now, I pray you, excuse me while I make up Mr. Clive's packets. By midnight you shall start, and in a few days you will be safe among our people. The Nawab's army is assembling at Plassey; but it's no use, Mr. Smithson—they won't fight as they did at Calcutta, and Mr. Clive will thrash them easily. Now, sir, you must take care of yourself. I will not be long.'

Mr. Watts was as good as his word. After a pleasant evening, in which he heard details of all the varying intrigues, and the moves and counter-moves, as Mr. Watts called them, on the political chessboard, Ralph Smithson was conducted to the boat which was ready

for his reception. He found that a native servant, abundance of supplies, and a comfortable bed, had been provided for him; and, bidding his host farewell, was soon bounding over the wavelets of the broad river, before a hot but freshening breeze.

CHAPTER XXII

THE EVE OF PLASSEY

1. Clive's Hesitation

I MUST pass over the happy meeting with Mr. Clive and many an old friend—it can be imagined perhaps better than described; and the joy of Cassim as he once more beheld his master's bronzed and bearded face was boundless. It is not easy to portray emotions which, at the same moment, have varied effects upon so many different people. Strange to relate, Ralph Smithson's appearance was, after all, no sudden surprise, for Mr. Watts had arrived in camp a few hours before him. On the morning of the night on which Ralph left his hospitable host, Mr. Watts found he could no longer remain at the Factory. The Nawab, suspicious and evil-minded, had suspected treachery, and was determined to revenge himself on one, at least, of the supposed authors of it. Dark hints had fallen from Omichund. Meer Jaffier, the Commander of his army, had attended the Durbar that night with a stronger escort than was consistent with etiquette, and Juggut Seit the banker was reserved, if not uncivil. The Nawab drank hard, but the stronger liquor he took seemed to have no effect upon him, except to aggravate his savage humour; and he had sworn a frantic oath, that in the morning he would see one Feringi, whom he hated, writhing in agony, impaled upon a stake in the market-place, and had given orders for Mr. Watts to be brought before him manacled. I might write of this frightful scene, but I refuse to defile these pages with a record of horrible oaths and curses, and fierce despair; or of drunken

raving in which the mutilated Derwesh, with a host of tortured victims, seemed to surround the miserable wretch and mock him with fearful cries. None of his attendants ever forgot the scene ; nor how, without one friend left to him, Suraj-oo-Doulah cried frantically for the lost Sozun—flung his turban on the ground—and shrieked for her to come to him. But Mr. Watts, as we know, had many friends ; and the order given regarding him passed in a whisper from one to another till it reached the Seit, who, apprehending real danger, sent down his best boat to the Factory with a crew on whom he could depend, and urged Mr. Watts to fly ; and as the day broke that good gentleman was safe, speeding before the wind which had carried on Ralph Smithson only a few hours before. Where or how they passed each other they never knew, but when Mr. Watts reached the camp safely, he soon told the tale he had heard to the wondering ears of his countrymen ; and it was only a few hours afterwards that Ralph himself appeared, and was received with cheers and welcomes which made ample amends for all his sufferings. This was on the 14th of June ; and on the 20th—that sad anniversary—I think that one very grateful and now humble heart sent up many an earnest prayer and thanksgiving to Him who, through all waywardness and trial, had brought him so far on his life's journey in safety, as he remembered the horrible prison of Calcutta, and those who had died there a year ago.

How different was it now ! The missing ships had reached Calcutta, which had been left strong enough to meet any possible attack. The fleet was there, and the brave old Admiral who had shortly before written to the Nawab, ' that he would raise such a flame upon the Ganges as all its waters should not quench.' A flame indeed ! a gallant army, three thousand devoted hearts, was marching up the river bank in array, such as the people there had never seen before, and a fleet of boats kept them company. There was no delay now. Mr. Clive saw what was in his power, and hastened to do it ; and yet, when on the 21st he had reached a point at which he must cross the great river, and fight that battle on which

the fate not only of Bengal but of all India depended for the future, Ralph Smithson, as many another, wondered perhaps at a temporary indecision, which has become a record in the memorable history of that campaign; and when Mr. Clive re-entered his tent, flung himself on his couch, and told his young friend how he had voted at the council of war, a feeling of bitter disappointment came over the young man, and he turned away to hide his tears.

‘We cannot fail, sir—we cannot fail,’ he cried. ‘Oh, Mr. Clive, if you had heard only what I have heard from the people themselves, you would not—you could not hesitate. God is with us, sir, and for the honour of England, I, humble as I am, beseech you to go on. If Robert Clive turned back now, what would they say in England? Better, sir, that you had not done so much, than fail now, at your greatest need, to do more.’

‘I cannot answer you now, Ralph,’ he replied, sadly—‘not now. Leave me to myself for a while. In this matter no one must share what I now feel. Dear to me as you are, I must be alone.’

Ralph Smithson left him, and went out of the tent. It was pitched on a high bank of the noble stream, and he sat down beneath a tree growing there, and looked over to the opposite shore with wistful eyes. ‘May he be firm, and resolute!’ he cried from his heart; ‘may there be no deed of shame for posterity to record!’ Behind him was the camp alive with merry noise and bustle; the arms were piled before the white tents, the bayonets sparkling in the sun, and the men lounging carelessly about, or gathered into groups singing—the sturdy Telingas, the active, hardy Mahrattas, so far from their dear western mountains, looking over the sacred river which it had been their envied fate to see. How many a tale of it would be told amidst the rocky crags and deep jungles of Maharashtra, when the gallant Bombay Sepoys should return! Bengal had no native army then, and it was with men as foreign to the spot they were on, as those from dear old England, that the work was to be done.

There had been a storm a few days before, and in

crashing peals of thunder, and torrents of rain, the south-west monsoon had opened. Now, the sky was mottled with fleecy clouds, which sailed northwards before the soft west wind; the fierce heat had passed away, and over the grassy plain the new herbage was already springing up, clothing it in a tender and vivid green. The river was calm and still, flowing with its silent majestic current, and groups of bathers were plashing in the sacred water, or praying in adoration of its holiness. Beyond was a fair level country, palm-trees and mango groves, with fields of corn and rice, mingled with the deep green of the indigo; and villages of brown thatched huts, and here and there the white pinnacle of a Hindu temple, or the dome of a Mahomedan mosque, nestled among the giant trees, showed the abodes of men. Boats flitted to and fro, with heavy sails set, or, with the low musical chant of rowers, sped down the stream more rapidly. There was no sign of resistance beyond. With his glass, Ralph Smithson could see files of women passing to and from the river with heavy water-jars, and the ploughs and oxen of the farmers busy in the moistened fields. Sometimes the faint lowing of cattle, or the fainter echo of a call from one man to another, reached his ear; but for all he could see to the contrary, the presence of the English host seemed to be unnoticed and uncared for. I think he had fallen into a dreamy state—reviewing old times and scenes perhaps, with the sough of Melcepeth woods, and the low murmur of Coquet, sounding in his memory. It might be such a day as this 21st of June at the dear old castle, and Constance and Grover and his beloved uncle walking on the terrace, perhaps thinking and talking of him: should he ever see them again?

2. *Clive's Ambitions*

‘What! musing, Ralph Darnell?’—Mr. Clive always called him Darnell when they were alone—‘of home, I’ll warrant. Ah, boy! this is a bigger stream than old Coquet, and I will give thee a penny for thy thoughts.’

The tone was merry and confident, and Ralph, who had not heard his Colonel’s approach, rose at once and

looked into his eyes. How well he knew, and rejoiced to see, the old expression of confidence and defiance mingled. How well he remembered it when they separated before the fight at Calcutta. 'Thank God!' he cried; 'it is as I hoped, and you are once more yourself.'

'Yes, Ralph, we shall be over there to-morrow, please the Lord!' he replied, pointing to the shore beyond; 'and then those fellows at Plassey may look to themselves. Why did I doubt? And yet it is better as it is; better I should do in a calm spirit what we have to do, than in a hasty mood which hath often—too often—led me into error and danger, precipitate this inevitable crisis. Listen, Ralph! For years past this crisis hath been shaping itself in my mind, and ever present. I have felt myself urged on, impelled by an irresistible force. It seems to me as if I had often hung back, refused to obey its commands, and yet, after a struggle, made a bolder leap than ever. You are quick-witted, and have heard some of my—my—ravings, perhaps, Ralph, you thought them; but did you see beyond them?'

'I knew you would have the French beaten out of Bengal, and would not rest till it was done,' said Smithson, bluntly; 'and you did not hesitate about that.'

'Yes, I did,' returned Clive, quickly. 'Had I followed up the Nawab on the 4th of February, he would have left me his guns and fled. Had I attacked the French then, we should have beaten them as we did afterwards; and yet I drivelled with that d—d Calcutta Council; but I am free of that now, my boy. Listen, Ralph! do you know why?'

'I cannot conceive, sir—it was not like you.'

'Ah! so there is one that believed in me. Listen! To no mortal have I breathed what I am going to tell you now. It may savour of folly, of bombast, of raving madness; but, by God! who will do it, it is true. Why did I hesitate? Because, Ralph, this movement cannot stop here. Once our territorial power begins, it must grow. State after state, prince after prince, must disappear before us—before the might of England and her

civilising power. To-morrow these native hosts will fly. I shall march on to take possession of a kingdom worth millions of treasure ; and I, Robert Clive, the son of a poor lawyer of Market Drayton, shall give it away to another, to be used for my country's good. Dare he who will receive it refuse to do what I dictate ? Impossible. Therefore he is but our Viceroy, to be fashioned and directed as we please. Why, Ralph, 'tis a bigger kingdom than England, and will be as rich ; and what I begin is but the beginning of the end. Others more daring than I, and more fortunate, will follow me, and our flag shall not only fly from side to side of India, but these people will be our subjects. Yes—I too have heard of the prophecy which they told thee of, and I believe it. For a hundred years ? Nay, that will be but a speck in the long glorious future. I am no parson, Ralph, as thou knowest well, and should be a bad hand at preaching from a text, and this is the only one I have ever tried to preach from '—and he touched his sword—' but can we circumscribe the power of the Most High ? I believe, Ralph '—and he took off his hat reverently—' that I, Robert Clive, am one humble instrument, to whose hand is committed the beginning of the end, and who can say when that may be ? That's what came into my mind when I drivelled and temporised with the Calcutta Council and the Nawab—that's what I was thinking when I recorded my opinion to-day that we should not fight ; and when I bade you go away just now, it was to think whether it were not a delusion of the foul fiend—and faith I believe it was ! The council of war wouldn't fight, but Robert Clive will, and, with God's help, gain a glorious victory. Listen to the cheers now ! I did but tell Mr. Walsh to go and say I had changed my mind, and we should cross at daylight—and hark ! the news has spread, and listen—hurrah for King George ! Let Mister Bussy look to himself. We shall have money enough to equip armies, and we will rout him out of the Circars, and stop his d—d plotting and contriving. I told them at the India House I would do all this—I must do it. But one might as well have talked to their money bags. Nor could I knock a spark of

enthusiasm into that stately uncle of thine ; but he shall hear of Plassey, sir—of Plassey !—and if that doesn't stir his heart within him, by Jove ! I'll give him up. Come ! we are wasting time. Get ye away to Kilpatrick ; I will go to Coote and the 39th myself. Tell him to get every boat moored to-night, and be ready to cross at dawn. But, Ralph, I'll not hear of your coming on with us ; you are weak, and have had enough of punishment.'

'Oh, Colonel ! Oh, Mr. Clive ! you would not order me to stay ! indeed, sir, I am strong—quite strong now. This last week and good cheer hath set me up. I never was heartier, nor have I a pain or ache anywhere.'

'You can't use your arm yet, my boy ; and it would be hard for a Darnell to keep out of the fray.'

'Can't I, sir ? Look here !'—and, stooping down, he seized a heavy dead branch that lay there, and whirled it about his head, so that it whistled in the air.

'Nay,' said the Colonel, laughing, 'if that's your weakness, I say no more. Come, in Heaven's name, and may it keep us safe.'

I think no nobler picture, or one of more interesting historic truth, could be painted than the passage of the joyous English force over the Ganges the next morning ; when, as the sun rose, hot and brilliant, before them out of the early mist, its light rested upon the red uniforms and glittering bayonets, the sparkling river, the crowds of strangely-shaped native boats and the rich, lovely country around. As boatload after boatload put off—first the English soldiers, with ringing, hearty cheers ; then the Sepoys, with their Hindoo cries of 'Jey Gunga Mata ! Clive Sahib Bahadur ke jey !'—victory to Mother Ganges ! Victory to the brave Mr. Clive !—and the hoarse 'Deen ! Deen ! Sabit Jung Bahadur ke futteh !' of the Mussulmans, commingling, formed a scene of exciting exultation, such as no one present ever saw again, or ever forgot. Why, in our national palace of Westminster, is not this glorious scene fitly commemorated ? Is there one in the annals of our country which has been followed by more momentous results to ourselves and to the millions we now govern ?

By four o'clock the army had crossed, and the troops were formed in column. It was eighteen miles to Plassey, and it was one in the morning of the 23rd June, when they arrived before it, and rested under a grove, which formed, as it were, a fortified position, because of the high earthen mound which the original planter of the orchard had raised up as a boundary ; and when pickets were thrown out, the wearied men lay down to rest.

Almost within cannon-shot was the fortified camp of the enemy. Had there been resolution enough then to have attacked the English, weary as they were when they arrived, perhaps the result might have been very different ; but no one moved. The shrill horns and drums played during the night, and the torches borne by bodies of men traversing the camp, the neighing of horses, and trumpetings and roars of elephants, came fresh and clear on the night wind, and the bright smoke hung over all, as it had done at Calcutta. For a time Ralph sat and watched, but there was no sign of movement in the enemy's camp, and at last he lay down. Presently sleep came heavily upon him, nor did he wake till the first cannon-shot fired on the 23rd crashed through a tree above him, and the battle of Plassey had begun.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BATTLE

1. *Evil Omens*

BUT the excellent position taken up by the little army was proof against cannon-shot ; and, to say the truth, whether by design or from unskilfulness, most of the cannon-balls sang over it harmlessly, or at best crashed among the tops of the thick mango-trees. Below them, soldiers, sailors, and sepoys rested in the shade, ate their cold salt junk and biscuit, or parched pease or rice and sugar ; and now, entirely recovered from their fatigue, burned for the order to advance against the enemy as

ardently as they had on the plain of Calcutta ; but they were held in hand wisely till the time should come. .

On the other side, the Nawab had arisen at his usual hour, and performed his morning prayer, with those assembled outside his tent. He was haggard, and had slept little. The night before had been passed till after midnight in the old drunken orgies, and the mimes and buffoons cried lustily for largesse, as they again represented the tragedy of the Black Hole, the windows and the scenes and contrivances for which had been brought on an elephant from the palace. This was a public representation ; for hundreds of officers and men had sat with him in the tent open to the camp, and witnessed the sight. 'No more of this foolery,' he had said to those about him ; 'when we take them all to-morrow, we will set stakes in a row, and impale Sabit Jung, and Watts, Kilpatrick, and Coote, and all the Feringi heroes upon them, and see some real amusement, and then we will blow them away from guns, and have peace in the land.' I think from what they saw that night in the camp, of hideous profligacy, buffoonery, and cruelty mingled, the French gentlemen present were ashamed of their protector and ally, and had a mind to give themselves up to a generous enemy—it might be their turn next.

When the guns opened on the English camp, after the morning prayer, the Nawab had mounted an elephant, and seemed to wish to lead on his army. He had said he would ; but he had missed a word in his prayer—he had not had the evil eye taken off him—the royal astrologer was not to be found—and so he hung back. It was not strange that he did not see the Moulvee who daily expounded the stars, nor the Brahmin Josee, of Plassey, who had been summoned to the astrological council. They had compared notes the day before, and dared not tell the Nawab that nothing lucky appeared for him, but much the contrary. Nor could the Nawab see his face in the jar of oil that was brought him—it was thick and cloudy. I think, therefore, when these combinations of gloomy foreboding occurred, that, in spite of the messages which came up every moment of

hundreds of Feringis being slain by the cannon, which continued to thunder away for some hours, Suraj-oo-Doulah was not content.

'Bring me their heads!' he would cry aloud—'a thousand rupees, a shieldful of rupees for every head! An estate for life to him who kills Clive!'

At that time Mr. Clive was taking another quiet sleep in a hunting pavilion in the grove, for he was in no hurry to advance, and was not attacked. He well knew the Nawab's custom of sleep at noon, and he and Ralph Smithson and Mr. Coote had concocted a pretty plan of dashing out on the enemy's camp as soon as it was quiet, and so routing it. One gentleman who, thinking he had found a rare opportunity to charge, began an attack of his own, was recalled, and roughly enough reprimanded. Perhaps Mr. Clive was waiting to be joined by Meer Jaffier ere he advanced; and large bodies of horse, which were careering about, with which that nobleman was known to be, were objects of suspicion all the morning. Some had even charged, but the black cavalry, as the men called them, went to the right-about pretty sharply, and fled away when a few rounds of shot and grape fell among them, and some officers fell, and some score of saddles were emptied. Ralph Smithson saw no Rohillas: Sozun therefore was not there. Every moment, as he, with others, looked over the bank, he expected to see a rush of his old blue-coated friends, or to hear the quick monotonous beat of their kettledrum, with their terrible war-cry, as they threw themselves recklessly against the position. But they never appeared; and, except a few stray shots, there was at noon the old strange silence, and Suraj-oo-Doulah slept.

2. *Clive's Attack*

Then in his turn, Mr. Clive arose refreshed, and repairing to the bank, gave a few orders, which were at once carried out. As he used to say afterwards, 'he sent his first compliments to his friends the Messieurs,' some forty of whom were posted with guns on a knoll; but it does not appear by the record that these gentlemen had much stomach for close acquaintance with bayonets

and boarding-pikes, and so cried for quarter, which was given; and as a similar party of men had been sent to an angle of the native camp, which was incontinently stormed, and they entered the entrenchment with the soldiers whom they had driven back, a general flight began, and was vigorously maintained.

Then Colonel Clive led out his main body, and charged up, shouting for King George, and 'if there had been a doubt in any of the fellows' minds,' as he would say, 'by George! sir, they made 'em up so sharp, that though we followed 'em six miles, and killed what we could, they had the heels of us, and we got all their forty pieces of cannon, and their stores, and tents, and gun-bullocks. In short, sir, we were set up altogether, without paying a penny for any of it, and, by God's mercy, lost but few men after all.'

Presently, too, a message came from Meer Jaffier—whom, not very well knowing friends from foes, they had not allowed to approach—that he would wait upon the 'Colonel Sahib' in the evening if he might; and a gracious answer having been accorded thereto, our brave Colonel and the other gentlemen did what they could to stay plundering and to rout the enemy. Does it not, however, seem wonderful, that when that small host appeared on the bank, some at least of the thirty-five thousand foot, and fifteen thousand horse, every man of which was as good as his own sepoy, did not turn on Mr. Clive, and try to save their honour?—or that a few horsemen did not rally about their Prince, and bear him away with a show of deliberation and respect? Had he not pampered them all, and bestowed ample largesse upon them? Had they not vaunted of the heads they would bring him?—and yet there was not one who went nigh him!

Not one! As the Nawab, dismounting from the elephant, went into his tent, there was nothing to show of the victory he heard of—not even one white-faced prisoner! 'The Nawab is sleeping!—Khamôsh!—silence' was passed through the camp. Did he think Clive would wait while he slept? He ate a slight meal and lay down, but he could not sleep. Juma was once more there,

kneeling beside him, kneading his master's legs and arms, while another rubbed his feet.

'All is strangely quiet,' said the Nawab. 'Even the English are not firing. Have they fled?'

'My lord's enemies dare not fire while he sleeps. It was the same when Calcutta was taken. They respected my Prince's rest, as they do now,' was the reply. 'Inshalla! my lord will see a pile of heads before evening'—and the 'Please God' was echoed by all present.

The Nawab sighed as he turned wearily. After all, he was too anxious to sleep, or, if he dozed at all, it was fitfully; starting up at every distant shot, and shivering as if at some inward fear so greatly, that Juma threw a shawl over him, hot as it was, and saw him drag it over his head and cower down beneath its folds. Even that did not spare what was to follow. Suddenly there broke forth a spattering fire of matchlocks, and two guns were fired in quick succession; then came sound of a heavy volley fired at once—another, and another, followed by a ringing cheer. He knew the sound of old, and it struck chill at his heart, as it has at the hearts of many another before and since in that land. Again he started up, and as he sat there with open mouth and staring eyes, one rushed into the tent, which it had been death otherwise to approach, and cried, in a voice of terror—

'Fly, O Prince!—the Feringis are upon us! Save thyself!—not a man stands, and there is treachery!—treachery! Fly, ere they are upon the tent!'

'He would kill me!—Clive would impale me!' cried the wretched being. 'Save me, Juma!—Sidi—Sadoc—where are ye?'

All had abandoned him already. Twisting a scarf hastily round his head, and a shawl round his waist, Suraj-oo-Doulah fled out into the camp. A camel-rider, who had arrived with a message from the palace, was just about to mount. He saw his Prince, and stood aside respectfully. 'Take the camel,' he said, putting the nose-rope into his hand; 'he is fast and sure; he will go at speed, and my lord might carry a cup of water in his hand without spilling a drop. Quick!—the Feringis are yonder. Look!'

There was no need to look. Suraj-oo-Doulah threw himself upon the beast, settled his feet in the stirrups as it rose heavily, and in a moment sped away faster than a horse could gallop.

CHAPTER XXIV

PURSUIT AND ESCAPE

1. The Nawab reaches his Palace

WHEN the miserable Suraj-oo-Doulah fled from his tent as Colonel Clive was storming through his camp, he had no companion. The camel-rider who had given his good beast to his master, tried to catch another to follow him, but in vain; and among the crowd of fugitives who fled by the road track, over fields, and dispersed among the surrounding villages, the Nawab found no companion, and desired none. Whom could he trust now? It were better to conceal himself; if he were discovered and seized, he well knew his fate, and shuddered at the prospect of what it would be. If he could only escape to Lucknow, to Delhi, to M. Bussy in the Circars—he might enlist partisans, and try the fortune of war; but were his brother-in-law to seize him, not even his mother could save him. 'Would he were dead!—would he had never been born!' the good old Begum used to cry, as she heard of new instances of cruelty and profligacy; 'what miserable fate is mine that my womb bore him!' and all these wailings were repeated to him, and he had many a time cursed her by whom they had been uttered.

No, he dared not go to her, nor could she protect him if he did. He dared not trust a eunuch or a servant—not one. His wife! Ah! she would mock him and exult over his fall; it was her turn now. The Englishwoman! Let her go; he had no anger against one so helpless. Her people would protect her. So, in the desolation of his ride that night—now stumbling through muddy rivulets, now wandering in the fields to avoid stragglers, now trusting to the instinct of his beast, which, unguided,

pressed on the beaten track—the only being he remembered in whom he could trust was Sozun. She it was alone of all who could help him to escape; but she was gone far away, he believed. He had not heard of her for months past, and she was little likely to come nigh him now. He could only measure the thoughts of others by his own. Had he an enemy in his power, would he not crush him? Could he secure Clive, or Meer Jaffier, or the Seit, would they be alive an hour?

I do not think these were pleasant thoughts to the young man in his wild ride from Plassey to Moorsheda-bad that night; but he could not shake them off, and before morning broke the weary beast knelt down in the courtyard of the palace, and the Nawab, dismounting, let him go. He was himself utterly wearied; his limbs throbbed and ached at the unwonted exertion of that night's ride, in which nothing but the certainty of instant death, should he be taken, had sustained him. Oh that he could rest! There was no one at the guard-room except an old woman, who swept it daily, and he saw her crouching over a fire in the corner; but he avoided her and went in. Once, as a servant passed before him, he sat down, and huddled upon the ground lest he should be observed; then again rising, he went towards the eunuch's guard-room, where there was a light burning, and, raising himself on his tiptoes, looked through the arabesque tracery of the window. At first the guard-room appeared empty; but as the lamp flared up before a breath of wind, he saw Nasir sitting upon the floor, his head bent upon his knees in his usual attitude of watching, and drawing his dagger, he entered. Nasir was slight and feeble—from him at least there was no treachery to be feared. The man heard the step, rose, and took up the naked sword which lay before him, and perhaps would have struck, but his master's cry, 'It is I, Nasir!—do not strike,' stayed the uplifted weapon.

'It is I,' he continued—'save me! I am alone and helpless,' and the Nawab sank on the ground.

Perhaps for an instant, as the weapon was again raised, memories of wrongs and insults endured, rushed through the man's heart, and urged a blow for which a new Nawab

would give ample reward ; but with them came the feeling of devotion to one who, wayward as he was, had at least spared his life at Calcutta, and he flung down the weapon, and tried to raise his master. ' She is here,' he said ; ' and I am watching her—Sozun, the fakeerni, is here.'

2. *The Nawab escapes*

Sozun ! There was safety in the very name, and the wretched man heard it with a cry of joy.

She was sitting at the window, we may remember, looking into the black void of gloom before her—for there were heavy clouds and no light—not, as before, decked in gorgeous raiment and jewels ; but in the humble grave-clothes she always wore now, and the strings of heavy beads about her neck, out of which she had loosed one, which was passing rapidly through her fingers. No one had heard yet of the result of the fight for certain, though rumours had arrived late in the afternoon. Juggut Seit had not been improvident. As the English drums were beating through the camp at Plassey, a carrier-pigeon had been thrown up from the camp bazaar, and had reached the city before evening, whereupon the great banker had only set additional guards, and closed his house more completely ; but faint rumours—how come no one could tell—began to be breathed about, and the guards about the palace, except those over the Treasury, went their way one by one and hid themselves till it should be known what master they were to serve. It was about this time that the boat which had brought Sozun from the Rohilla camp above the city rowed under the palace, and, bidding the men wait her orders, she went on into its courts. No one noticed her or stopped her, and of all the hosts of servants she found but Nasir, and bade him watch, and he had done so, as his master found him, without stirring.

Sozun feared the worst. For some days past the event had hardly been doubtful. Noor Khan and her countrymen were indifferent as to the issue. They could at least again travel westwards, and, mercenaries as they were by profession, obtain service. If Suraj-oo-Doulah were

defeated, and the English desired them to stay, they had at least a friend in Ralph Smithson. When she saw the desolation of the palace, her first care was for the Begum, and to the wondering ears of the lonely woman she told the tale of desertion and coming evil. The door of the underground apartments was not shut, and the women might have walked forth unimpeded; but they did not stir. They dared not encounter the risk, and so stayed on; but I can imagine how Julia Wharton grew pale and flushed by turns, and how with beating hearts the two women sat together all that night listening to every sound, and from time to time sent Anna as far as she dared to go to gain intelligence.

'You will not see me again, mother,' Sozun had said to the Begum, 'till I have placed him safe beyond his enemies, if indeed he come at all. If not, I will not leave you again; I will share your fate.'

So they had watched all that night, where thousands of voices were wont to take up the hackneyed cry of adulation, 'May long life and wealth increase!' till the Nawab came in stealthily like a thief, and cried out in a faltering voice—'Sozun, O Sozun! I die—I die! Do thou protect me, else they will kill me. Even now they follow. Listen!' and so threw himself down beside her, utterly exhausted.

Sozun did not hesitate; there was no time for rest, for food, for collecting money or jewels, except some which were in a casket in the room; or for dallying with the grim fate which she knew pursued him. 'Come,' she cried, seizing his hand—'come, else it will be too late, and I cannot save thee. Come—Food! Is food better than life? Rest! Will not sleep lead thee to the stake, or to be dragged at the elephant's foot? Come! No—not thou, Nasir; stay with them. If the Feringis come, take them to her, and say I sent thee. Guard the palace with thy life. Come!' she cried, frantically, placing her head upon the Nawab's feet as he pleaded for rest. 'Listen to the shouts—they have the news in the Bazaar.'

Between them they dragged the almost unconscious man to his feet, and hurried him down the private stair, along the court, and to the window above the boat which

Sozun had left moored at the river bank. 'Are ye ready?' she cried to the men.

'Ready,' they answered. 'We waited but for thee; but it will blow hard—can ye not stay?'

Stay! and the shouting became wilder! 'Push off,' she cried, as she helped the Prince down from the window and led him on board, where, staggering into the little cabin, he flung himself upon the carpets she had provided, and groaned aloud. Then she spread a blanket over him and retreated to the prow of the vessel, watching the white foam dash from its sides, as with its broad sail set it sped on before the fresh west wind towards the great main branch of the Ganges.

CHAPTER XXV

DESTINY

1. In the hands of the Fakeer

As the night passed—little, indeed, had remained of it—the boat sped on; and as the waves curled before the prow falling off in sheets of foam, still Sozun sat and watched. Occasionally she heard the querulous cry of the Nawab as he called her name, begged for a softer place to rest on, or for food. What wish of his had ever been ungratified? What luxury ever denied him, or become impossible of attainment? Here dry bread would have been delicious. She did not, however, trust him alone, and would not go to him.

Day broke, and the waves curled higher and higher, as the boat rolled before the freshening gale. There was a sense of freedom in the position of the girl, as she sat on the high prow watching the porpoises chasing each other round and round the vessel, and plunging into the foam it cast aside, and a consciousness of daring which infused a new spirit into her heart. If she could only take him away in safety, far far beyond his bitter enemies, she would have done her duty. If, Ya-Allah Kureem! if only that, then no matter what followed

herself—some cell of a fakeer, or a tree, or an old tomb by the river bank ; or her lute and the charity of men wandering to visit holy shrines, and so pass on to her own land and be forgotten, and there forget the fierce excitement of her life.

Another querulous cry from her companion could not be resisted, and she went to him. Ah ! what a face she saw—so broken, so haggard, so wan, with bloodshot eyes and uncombed hair, cowering beneath the coarse black blanket one of the boatmen had thrown over him. ‘Get to shore,’ he moaned, piteously ; ‘O Sozun, I die !—what matter if they kill me !’

‘Silence,’ she said, in a whisper ; ‘I dare not come near thee—silence, else they may hear. I cannot trust them. The boat rolls, can we get to the shore ?’ she asked of the steersman.

‘If you please, lady ; but it is a fine wind, and we could get very far if you did not stop,’ was the reply.

‘My lord is ill,’ she replied. ‘Is not that a fakeer’s habitation ?’

‘It is,’ said the man, with a reverential gesture ; ‘a holy man, whom we all worship, lives there. He tells us of fair winds and blesses the boats ; and all we give him he spends in charity. Yes, we can bear up and go there ;’ and so, bracing up the sail, the boat heeled over to the wind and reached the shore quickly.

There was a small hut there, built of reeds and thatched with rice-straw, by the side of which were a few rude water-jars. Beside the hut rose a huge banian-tree—one of those glorious monarchs over which the revolutions of ages have passed, marking only the growth of its giant proportions. Its gaunt white arms, flung abroad to the sky, groaned and creaked as the long pendant roots swung to and fro, quivering in the rising gale, and its foliage rustled with a hoarse murmur. As the prow of the boat touched the shore, a gaunt figure, stooping low, emerged from the hut, naked, except a cloth wrapped round his loins, and a tattered black blanket thrown hastily about his shoulders. The man seemed a living skeleton, wasted by illness or perpetual vigils—one of those fearful objects which, in the guise

of religious devotees, are sometimes seen and never forgotten.

The figure advanced to the boat and cried with a harsh hollow voice, 'What do women here? Begone, daughter!—you have a fair wind—begone, and touch me not!'

'Bawa!' cried one of the boatmen, throwing him a rope, 'be merciful—there is one ill in the cabin, and we will rest but for an hour: fasten the rope—be quick!'

'He took the rope and tied the end to a bush as Sozun sprang on shore, and the boat swung round in calmer water. 'Only for a while, father,' she said, as she bent down and kissed his feet—'only for a while, and we will go on again when it is calmer.'

'Who art thou,' he cried, 'with so fair a face, that weareth the grave-clothes of God's chosen? Come, in His name!'

'What thou seest,' she said, meekly—'one who desires to live and die in a place like this. I am hungry—wilt thou give me to eat?'

'And who is with thee? A man, they said?'

'A helpless man,' she said, 'who is ill and faint with hunger.'

'Wait!' said the fakeer; 'the meal is out, and 'tis time I went to the village for more. Can he not go thither?'

'It is far,' she said, 'and we will wait. He could not walk so far—he is weak.'

'Wait, then,' he replied—'the gale is rising; bring him to the hut—he can rest there;' and, taking up a staff and wallet which lay on the ground, he strode away across the fields.

'Sozun, Sozun,' cried the Nawab, 'take me out of this place! it reels under me, and I am giddy and faint.'

What should she do? If any one saw him he might be known, and would be lost; but again, as she hesitated, the despairing cry came from the boat, and she saw him striving on hands and knees to crawl out of the wretched cabin through which the chill gale was blowing in fiercer gusts every moment, mingling with the hoarse cries of the boatmen busy fastening another rope to the bank.

'Help him!' she exclaimed, descending to the boat; and two of the men, taking him up, carried him to her.

'Thou art cold,' she said, 'but there are the blankets, and the old man said we might shelter thee within. Come, he has gone for food, and we must wait.'

There was a rude bed in the hut. The boatmen brought up a carpet and covering, and the miserable Nawab lay down and sank beneath it, cowering at the blast, which whistled through the reed walls of the poor dwelling. 'Do not leave me, Sozun,' he said piteously; 'whom have I now but thee?'

'I will not leave thee,' she replied, drawing the blanket more closely about him. 'He will return soon with food—sleep, we are safe here;' and she sat there by him silently. How long, she did not know. Time is slow in passing in any great need; but he seemed to sleep—that was enough.

Suddenly the door of the hut was darkened, and the gaunt figure stooped and entered. 'I have brought food, daughter,' he cried, 'ready to be eaten. Let him sit up and eat.'

As the hoarse tones of the old man's voice reached the ear of the Nawab, Sozun saw him cower more deeply under the covering above him, trembling violently. In another moment, as if it had stifled him, he threw it aside and sat up with a face in which horror and fear were frightfully combined. 'The Derwesh!' he shrieked. 'Oh save me!—Oh save me! Mercy, mercy!'

'Dohai Feringi!' cried the Derwesh, at once seizing the shivering man with an iron grasp. 'Dohai Feringi! Suraj-oo-Doulah! dost thou remember this?' and he tore down his matted hair, which spread itself over his gaunt shoulders. 'Dost thou remember these?' and raising his hair alternately on both sides, he showed the white cicatrices of his mutilation. 'Dost thou remember the durbar and the Derwesh? I am he!'

The Nawab struggled to free himself, but what was his power to resist those lean, nervous fingers, clutching his throat?

'Kaffir!' cried the Derwesh between his closed teeth, 'be still, else I will strangle thee. Allah hath given thee

into my hand, and will do justice ! Thy days of iniquity are full, and thou shalt die ; but not by my hand. ' Ho ! without ! who are there ? ' he cried to several men, who, attracted to the spot by the arrival of the boat, were talking to the boatmen. ' Come in quickly and bind him—bind him fast ! '

As he spoke, several men crowded in, and in an instant Suraj-oo-Doulah was bound tightly with a turban, and lay on the bed as if dead.

' You have killed him ! ' cried Sozun, who had vainly endeavoured to wrest away the hands of the Derwesh. ' Oh, spare him ! let him go if he be alive—in the name of the Most Merciful.'

' Peace ! ' cried the Derwesh, ' oh shameless ! Thou in the garb of holy saints, to be in his company ! Bind her, friends ; she is one of his wantons. Let them die together ! '

' We have bound him fast,' cried one of the sturdy villagers—' fast enough. Who is he, Bawa ' ?

' Who is he ? The tyrant ; he who hath robbed ye of your sisters—who hath ground ye to poverty by his extortions—whom the Feringis pursue, and for whom ye will receive plenteous reward at the city.'

' The Nawab ! ' cried the men, starting back with amazement.

' Ay, the Nawab, friends—look at him ! Very different is he now from when these ears were laid before him in his power of evil. Look at him—do ye doubt ? Away with him—away with him ! Take him up—I will accompany ye to the durbar, the Feringis will do me justice. Dohai Feringi ! '

' Away with them ! We will do your bidding, Baba,' cried a burly fellow, taking up the Nawab as he would a child, and passing out. ' Bring on the woman, some of ye.'

' I will not run away—I will follow him,' said Sozun, sobbing piteously. ' I am but a weak woman. Loose my arms, for they hurt me sorely.'

' Well, it's no matter about a woman,' said one of the men, good-naturedly, loosing her bonds. ' Come with us, quick ! see, they are already far off.' And when they went out of the hut she saw the men bearing the almost

lifeless body of the Nawab across the fields to the village, and the Derwesh striding before them flinging his arms into the air, while the wild cry of 'Dohai Feringi! justice, O Feringi!' came fitfully through the roar of the wind in the tree above her.

'It is his fate,' she said, 'but I will not desert him. Lead on,' and she followed with a heavy heart, weeping.

2. *Julia Rescued*

About the same time that morning, Ralph Smithson and his companion reached the city. They had ridden all night, and as the day broke, the fresh air and rising breeze had refreshed them, and the horses they rode stepped out at a brisk pace. 'We shall soon be there,' said the leader of the escort, 'and my lords can do as they please then; they are our protectors, and we are ready to serve our master's friends faithfully.' It caused both the young men to marvel much, as they conversed together, how men they believed enemies yesterday, could be so soon changed into devoted servants; but the Jemadar of horse was no deceiver. The gentlemen had been committed to his care; the English were their deliverers from much tyranny and disquiet; and as the cavalcade passed along, grey bearded men met them at villages, offered flowers and milk, and bowed before them as conquerors.

'The first thing we have to do is to see after the Treasury, Mr. Smithson; you will remember the Colonel's orders? These fellows appear very faithful, and we will put them there as a guard. I only hope we may be in time to prevent plundering. What do you think, Jemadar Sahib? is the Treasury safe?'

'My lord need not fear,' said the man. 'You see we have passed no one, and no one has gone before us; all our people will collect round the new Nawab at once, and there is no fear. The guard over the Treasury is one of hereditary soldiers, who only know the head of the state and their own duties. If Suraj-oo-Doulah were to ask them for ten rupees to-day, he would not get it. But you will soon see; there is the city. Look! there are the minarets, and the Nawab's palace.'

'Will the Nawab, Suraj-oo-Doulah, be there?' asked Ralph Smithson. 'If so, he may oppose our entrance, and we must take him if we can.'

'Suraj-oo-Doulah will be mad if he has tarried there,' said the man; 'and if even he be there, no one will resist. I know Nasir, the eunuch; he will let you in. But there are women there,' continued the man, doubtingly—'they should be honourably treated.'

'Their honour is our own—they are our sisters and mothers,' said Mr. Walsh. 'Is it not so, Smithson? Tell him so.'

'They are indeed,' was the reply. 'Fear not, sir; we have no war against women: but there is one there who must come away.'

'Ah! yes,' replied the man—'one of your own people, sir. I had been afraid to mention her; and we have all pitied her sad fate. I thank God she will be among ye once more.'

And thus conversing, the time and distance were soon passed; and the friends and their escort—traversing the streets of the city with some difficulty through the crowds of joyous people, who welcomed them with shouts, and threw over them garlands of flowers—drew rein in the outer court of the palace. No one was there; and the native officer, dismounting with them, went on to the eunuch's guard-room, calling to him by name. Nasir answered the summons, and came out.

'She told me to wait here, and take you to her,' said the man, humbly; 'I am ready to obey my lord's orders, if you are he who should come.'

'She! Who?'

'Sozun, the Afghan girl,' he replied; 'she was here at night, but she left with the Nawab when he fled.'

'I can't go with you, Smithson,' said Mr. Walsh; 'I must see after the Treasury at once. It is close by they say; you will find me there.'

'Lead on,' said Ralph to the eunuch, as his companion left him; and I may be believed when I write that his heart was beating very wildly.

Since the Nawab had left the palace for Plassey, the two women in the chambers underground had taken

little rest. Different feelings agitated each ; both might be freed, and yet how differently ! So long as the Nawab lived and was in power, both were hopeless, and the dreary days of the hot weather, without employment, without change had been passed wearily by Julia Wharton. The Begum's occupation of embroidery was taken up by her, and this was helped out by chess, and whatever else could be resorted to to pass time ; but after all those were weary days—very weary ; and yet she thanked God it was not as it had used to be, when treasures were laid at her feet only to be spurned—a hideous time, over the remembrance of which many a shudder passed. It was strange, however, how the women grew to each other by a common misfortune, and affecting, too, to see the little indulgences the Begum denied herself, so that her companion might be happy ; or if she ailed aught, how lovingly she was tended by her. If Julia could have learned more of her beautiful companion's language, their intercourse would have led to more active sympathy ; but Anna had after all to be the general interpreter, and I fear her rendering of the graceful, courtly Hindoe of the Begum on the one hand, and the vigorous English of the Englishwoman on the other, did not help either much.

What would the issue be ?—would her countrymen be victorious ? I believe Julia Wharton never doubted that for a moment ; and when they heard that the English were at last at Plassey, her joy was unbounded. ' You will see my people—my brave, beautiful people,' she said, ' and will love them ; and when Sozun came so strangely and told Julia how Ralph Smithson had been saved by her, had gone to Clive, and was with him—how, as she thought, he would surely come and deliver her himself, as she should tell Nasir he would—I am sure the poor soul was well-nigh distraught at the joy which seemed so near, and yet might be so cruelly blighted. That night the women slept not ; they sat with their arms twined round each other on their carpet scarcely speaking a word, and sending Anna as often as they dared for news ; but none came. There seemed a strange stillness in the palace, for which they could not

account, till Sozun appeared once more and told them every one had left, and that she dared only remain till daylight, and so they only grew the more and more anxious.

Then Nasir came again and said the Nawab had been defeated, and the English were following him. He had arrived and gone away in Sozun's boat, and the thankfulness of both those hearts was poured forth in prayer. What might not the tyrant have done had any fit of rage possessed him? But we know, though they did not then, that he was already sunk too low for that; and Nasir again left them, and said he would watch outside till morning—and they were once more alone.

Day broke, and its dull light came slowly through the grated windows of the vault; still no one visited them, not even Nasir. Should he fail after all, and leave them like the others? Julia could not rest. Every morning for hours she had paced that chamber, and now her movements were rapid and capricious. She drew the bed to the wall, mounted on it, and tried to look out: but all she could see or hear was the grey sky, with clouds hurrying over it, and the murmur of the trees; and again she descended, sat down, rose, listened, and held her hand to her heart to still its beating. The Nawab was defeated, and the English were following—that at least she understood. Oh, there was no doubt they would come!

'You should be patient, sister,' said the Begum. 'If it is the will of God, they will come. Sit down and rest.'

Rest!—impossible. She would soon hear a bugle-call—the dear old drums and fifes playing a merry English tune, and the cheers of the men as they marched through the town. Rest! When the cries began in earnest, the roar of the people greeting her friends penetrated that chamber! How could she rest? Then came a dull tramp of horse, and sounds of native welcomes, of troops calling to each other in the court, and confused murmurs.

'It must be Meer Jaffier,' cried the Begum, with exultation; 'and I shall go to my mother. My mother!—to see her with these weary eyes—O Beneficent!'

Presently, as they listened, they heard steps descending the stair. There were two sounds; one, the habitual shuffle of Nasir, which they knew so well, the other, the strong tread of a heavy nailed boot. Julia tried to spring to the door, but she could not; she felt sick and faint from excitement, and crouched down. Then the door opened, and Nasir said, 'They are here, my lord'; and a tall figure advanced, holding out its hands in the gloom, but did not speak.

'Ralph!—Ralph Smithson!' cried Julia, rising and throwing herself on his neck. 'My saviour!—my—'

She could say no more. He felt her panting against him and trying to swallow, and he held her to his heart more closely.

'Julia, you are saved!—saved!' he cried. 'Let us thank God for this.' And they knelt down together.

'And this is she of whom Sozun told me?' he said, as they arose. 'Lady, I thank thee for all thy kindness to her; but for thee she had died.'

'Nay, but not me, sir. Thank Him who hath watched over us both.'

The voice was inexpressibly sweet and low, and as Ralph Smithson's eyes grew more accustomed to the light, it was difficult for him to remove them from a face in which so much beauty, resignation, and tenderness were combined.

'Come,' he said, 'not here—not here, would I see you. Come up into the blessed light of day, both of you. There is no reserve before me lady. Am I not her brother?' And they followed him.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE NAWAB'S LAST MARCH

1. *The Begum Released*

'I AM not fit to look on; you must loathe me, Ralph,' said Julia Wharton, as they reached the light, open apartment to which the eunuch led them, and she turned

away from him with a gesture of despair. 'May God pardon me, for I was very helpless. Can I be forgiven?'

She was pale from long confinement, but perhaps more beautiful than ever; and the strange Mahomedan costume in which she was dressed, increased, if possible, the peculiar charm of her features, while it displayed her graceful figure to the greatest advantage. Her health, strange to say, had been good; and except in the delicate pallor of her face, there were no traces of the weary life she had passed.

'Forgiven, Julia?' he replied. 'Ah, yes! there is no bound to forgiveness prayed for and entreated as you have besought in your misery and need. And He hath heard your cry. See! I never expected to meet you again, but you are here, and have a happy life, I trust, before you.'

'Oh, no, no, no!' she sobbed; 'never, never—never again. All I trust is, that one so polluted may be allowed to hide away in some quiet nook of England, and be forgotten.'

'Have you any friends—any relations?'

'Yes,' she said; 'but I could not expect them to receive me. Oh! not now, Ralph. I sometimes used to pray for death, and she yonder, my more than sister, used to rebuke me, and say my words were evil. She used to tell me to submit to my fate, and bear it patiently, because it was God's will; and if bright days came I should be grateful, and if misery, still He was great and merciful. O Ralph! I, a Christian woman, have had more blessed teaching from her than I ever had from my own people. I did not know, till I began to understand her, that her faith rested upon our common Father's mercy and pity like our own; and I fear, while I could not express my own thoughts, that my poor servant's attempts to convey them were little better. Can you thank the Begum for me? Have you enough knowledge of her language?'

I believe that Ralph did his best. He had at least acquired a fluent tongue if not a learned one, and in this respect his temporary seclusion among the Rohillas had been of incalculable advantage to him. As he had used

to speak with Sozun, so he could speak with the lady before him ; and I think, after the first shyness had been broken, that he even became eloquent as he detailed Julia's gratitude, and assured her of Colonel Clive's, and the thanks of all his countrymen, for her affectionate care.

'Noor-ool-Nissa!'—'A light of beauty' indeed. Scarcely eighteen perhaps, fair in face, and with a lithe gracefulness of figure, the lady before him was more lovely than he could have believed a native of India to be. There was no colour in her face, which resulted, perhaps, from her long residence in a darkened room ; but in its rich creamy tints her skin was like ivory, and her dark-grey eyes, long eyelashes, and sweet mouth left nothing to be desired. Sozun was beautiful, but her wild excitable features had no charm like these, which had been despised and thrown aside ere their full beauty had been developed.

'No, no—no more,' she said, as a faint blush spread itself over her cheek and forehead at Ralph's passionate encomiums ; 'my lord's estimation of my poor services is too great, and she has cheered me in our loneliness as much as—as—No matter, sir—may she be as happy among her people as I shall be among mine. I have many loving kinsfolk, and my husband's dear mother will protect me till, perhaps—his heart may be softened. Of all this, sir, you will be the author, and till her death—Noor-ool-Nissa will be grateful. Every night a lamp will be lighted in your name, and before it she will pray for your prosperity and my sister's. Ah, sir ! how can I part with her ?'

'Not yet—not yet,' cried Julia in her broken tongue ; 'till I leave this, I will not go from you. O Ralph ! is she not beautiful !'

Julia had crept beside the lady, and thrown her white arms around her. The Begum's cheek rested upon one which was about her neck, and she seemed to nestle there, while tears, though she smiled and patted Julia's face, were fast falling from her eyes.

'To be free,' she said—'to see the heavenly sky once more, to breathe the air, to hear men's voices, to look over the broad river and the open country, to see the

trees and flowers!—ah, sister! these seem to me like scenes in the garden of Paradise, where the houris dwell for ever ministering to the just, who rise in the judgment and pass into bliss; and are we, so long buried in a living grave, and, under God, raised thence by him, your brother, ever to forget what he hath done? I am no flatterer, sir; but through these weary months, since she was sent to me, I have heard of that night of horror in Calcutta, and prayed I might see him who had saved her. Enough for me that this hath been granted, and that I can go into my seclusion with the memory of the face of one so brave and constant lying at my heart.'

I think Ralph Smithson would willingly have lingered in that sweet company, but there was much to be done which he could not neglect. By this time some of the women-servants had returned to the palace; a suit of rooms in the private apartments was hastily fitted up, and for the present Julia and the Begum would remain together, till the necessary arrangements could be completed for both. Of the Nawab there was no news; and it was not possible they could experience trouble on his account.

Ralph found that Mr. Watts had followed them, and was already taking charge of the Treasury. He was well known in the city, and confidence was at once established. The revolution was in fact complete; and the presence of a few British officers prevented those scenes of licence, bloodshed, and revenge which would otherwise have ensued. Did they ever forget the superb breakfast which the head steward of the Nawab's kitchen set before them in solemn exercise of his office, and which their servants seemed weary of carrying in? or did they ever eat a meal with heartier appetite than in that pleasant garden pavilion by the river? And when Colonel Clive followed two days later, marching up leisurely with the troops, and entered the city in triumph, with the horns, pipes, gongs, and drums of native music sounding, and the dear English drums and fifes and bugles rising clear above all the din, and playing many a merry old-fashioned tune—when the people hung about him, covering him with wreaths of jessamine

flowers and shouting 'Victory!'—when he saw the exceeding richness of the city, the beauty of the buildings, and the evident joy of the people of all classes—he, too, thought that what he had been fighting for was no longer a doubtful myth, but a noble, heart-stirring reality. He walked through vaults full of gold and silver coin; treasure-chests were opened before him, and the torchlight flashed from caskets of precious diamonds and pearls; while piles of gorgeous shawls, fabrics of cloths of gold and silver, were more than could be counted. Had he chosen to take all, he might have done so; and in after times, when in England his countrymen accused him of venality and rapacity, he bade them remember these scenes, and wonder—as he did himself—at his moderation.

Need I pause to describe ceremonials? I think not. How Meer Jaffier refused to seat himself on the royal seat till Mr. Clive took him by the hand and led him there—how the great banker Juggut Seit entertained the English officers, and troops of dancers and singers performed before them; and even the old mummers, who now enacted the battle of Plassey, and showed how their former patron the Nawab ran away, and the victorious English followed.

2. *Retribution*

The miserable wretch who had been a prince, and whom, abject and terror-stricken after his capture, feeling that hope was already dead—we left with the rough villagers of—poor, was being borne across their corn-fields, with the old Derwesh striding before him, shrieking 'Dohai Feringi! Dohai Feringi!' till he was hoarse.

Perhaps if the village elders, when he was brought to them, and in his abject terror besought their compassion, had had their own way, I think, timorous as they were, and weighing the chances of the Nawab's escape from his pitiless adversaries and restoration to his late power, they would have released him. Had this been done, he might have found his way to his friend Monsieur Law, who, with some Frenchmen and native soldiers of an ally, was marching down the Ganges bank to make a

diversion against Mr. Clive ; but this was not fated to be. One had mounted guard over the Nawab who could not be defied, and would not be cajoled—whose worst passions of revenge had rendered him alike deaf to entreaty and to greed of gain. Once only did the elders plead for the wretch before them.

‘Listen to him, O Seyn!’ said one of the village council, who was a rich Mahomedan farmer, to the Derwesh. ‘He promises a mosque ; he will endow it with lands. He will build it where thy hut is, and there shall be a serai for weary travellers to rest in. He will make thee chief of the charity, and thou shalt dispense his bounty, and find a resting-place for thy life. He will make thee wealthy. He will make thee amends for—’

‘Perish his gold!’ cried the old man, fiercely interrupting the speaker. ‘Let the earth hide it, as it will hide him soon, who is a shame to God’s creatures. Was he charitable when, as God’s agent on earth, he sat on the seat of judgment? Was he kind to the aged, helpless Derwesh whom he invited to his court? Was he merciful? As he did, so let be unto him. Dohai Feringi! Dohai Feringi! Let the English do justice on him—not I. Let them be judges between us, not ye who fear him. Have ye known what I suffered? Never yet have I told ye. Look! I had ears once, and he took them. I say,’ and his voice rose to a scream as he unwound his matted hair, ‘I had ears! Look ye—are there any now? Blood for blood! Hath not the Holy Prophet said it? Away with him! Dohai Feringi! away with him! Away with him and his wanton to death!’

‘Brothers—friends—pity. Be merciful to me—your Prince!’ cried the Nawab. ‘Be merciful to me and let me go. Let me go! Who dare refuse me?—me and mine! Would ye do murder on one who has never harmed ye? Would ye listen to the raving of a mad fanatic? Would ye slay your master? Would ye give him up to his enemies? See, there are jewels. She has them; take them, they are precious. Oh, sirs! by your mothers, by your children, do not this wrong. Let me go! Oh, mothers! by your sons—I too have a mother—let me go to her!’

He was appealing, with piteous cries and gestures, now to the men and now to the women, and not without effect. Many of the latter broke into the hysterical sobbing common to the lower orders of women everywhere, who, forgetting facts, grow excited under such appeals to their sympathy. 'He has a mother,' some said; 'why should he die? The Feringis will hang him. He must die if he be given to them.' Perhaps if there had been delay, there would have been reaction in his favour, and it seemed that the issue lay on a moment. The Derwesh saw the danger, and sprang to the Nawab's side, snatched a dagger from the waistband of one of the village guards, and held it to the Nawab's heart.

'I will strike,' he said, 'if ye hesitate. I swear by God, I will strike! He shall not escape me. He or I! — Beware!'

'Hold him! Take the knife from him!' cried many of the women and some of the men, with a strange clamour; and one burly fellow advanced as if he would essay to do so.

'I said beware!' cried the Derwesh, drawing up his tall gaunt form, about which the long matted locks of hair, before tied round his head, were streaming. 'I said beware! If you stir,' he continued to the man who had stepped forward, 'not only shall he die, but my blood will be on your heads, and on your children's—on your mothers', and on your wives.' My spirit will haunt you! Wherever you go my blood shall cry out against you! In your fields, in your houses, by your beds, ye shall hear the old man's cry—Dohai Feringi!—shrieking in the storm blast and in the thunder; and ye will remember ye denied him the Feringi's justice. Beware! my blood is upon you!' and as he spoke he drew the knife sharply across his breast, and the blood streamed out over his naked body.

Then women shrieked and wept, and beat their breasts; and the men prostrated themselves, Moslim and Hindu alike, before the terrible fanatic. 'Curse us not,' they cried; 'take him away. As ye list with him; but spare us and our children, and let not thy blood be on us and ours.'

The Derwesh made no reply ; he only pointed to the wound he had inflicted upon himself ; and while he held down Suraj-oo-Doulah with one hand, raised the other as if to stab him. ' Away with him ! away with him ! ' rose a shout in which there seemed no dissent. No one heard the piteous cries of the wretch who, trembling and gasping at the imminent thought of death, was groveling at the old man's feet, clasping his knees, and being spurned away like a dog.

' Coward ! ' he cried ; ' if thou art to die, bear thy fate like a man. She, thy wanton there, would have more courage. Swear to me,' he continued to some of the young men of the village, who had brought up a rude bed-litter, ' that ye will guard him safely, and with your lives. Swear on my blood ! '

' We swear ! ' cried fifty hoarse voices, but there was little need now ; there was no chance of check to the new excitement. ' Away with him ! ' was the shout from old and young. ' Take him to the Feringi ; take him to Meer Jaffier.'

' I was burned by his orders,' cried one hag ; ' for they said I was a witch. Look at the marks. The hot iron seared me in the market-place, and the smoke of my flesh went up as a witness against him. I cursed him, and see what he has come to.'

' Let him go to death ! ' screamed another woman, who rushed forward with frantic gestures ; ' did he not seize two of my daughters, and destroy them in the zenana ? Where are they ? Where are my children—my jewels—my darlings ? What hast thou done with them ? Oh, friends, ask him what became of them. Ha ! ha ! ha ! ' she laughed wildly, ' he took them to be his wantons, and they are dead—Dohai Feringi ! '

' Dohai Feringi ! ' echoed the Derwesh ; ' thou shalt have justice, mother. Come with me and see it—come and see him die, as I shall ! '

The litter had come up, borne by four stout fellows—a rude bedstead with bamboos tied to the corners, and a strong pole to carry it by. There was a rough, unkempt pony for the Derwesh, another for Sozun ; and without further parley the Nawab, bound as he was, was

taken up and put upon the litter. Some one flung over him a tattered blanket, which partly covered him as he lay groaning and shivering with fear. There was no hope now—none. He must go to death. All his own people would be relentless; but Clive might—might have mercy. Mercy? and the memory of the agonies of the English prison at his heart, and the horrible deaths of his murdered countrymen to avenge! Mercy from him? No—there was no mercy anywhere now. The men who ran by the side of his litter jeered and mocked him with grotesque salaams; and, as he implored them to loosen his arms, taunted him with the tortures he had inflicted upon many a victim, and let him lie.

A mad procession! Ere one village had been passed, they heard at the next that the Nawab was coming. The Nawab's 'Suwari,' as it was called in mockery—the Nawab's retinue! What a retinue it was for one who, a few days before, had ridden to Plassey on an elephant with housings of velvet and cloth-of-gold, surrounded by the pomp of royalty and the gorgeous military display of an Eastern army! Before all, riding a gaunt horse, which some had substituted for the pony, naked, except his waist-cloth, with his matted hair streaming over his face and down his back—the blood still oozing from the wound he had inflicted on himself, and for which he seemed to have no concern—rode the old Derwesh, brandishing his bright steel trident, and shouting in his shrill harsh voice, 'Dohai Feringi! Come and see, O ye faithful, the justice of the Nazarenes! Come!—delay not!—a tyrant and his wanton going to death! Come and see!—come and see a "coward die!" Dohai Feringi!'

Near where he had resided, the old man was known and venerated; but, as the strange travellers passed on, it seemed that the excitement only grew the stronger. No tarrying for meat or drink—no tarrying for change of bearers. Men jostled each other for the privilege of putting their shoulders under the pole of the litter, and the few village guards had swelled to hundreds, and were increasing. Men left their ploughs and looms, their shops and trades, and hastily snatching up the

household sword and shield, or spear and matchlock, still hurried on, and joined the hoarse cry, 'Dohai Feringi ! Dohai Feringi !'

As to Suraj-oo-Doulah himself, I hardly think I can be expected to say much of him. Men in his position, with a certain and horrible death staring them in the face, may think upon it, if they be brave and self-reliant. If not, they are numb with terror. They cannot realise what is to come. The faculty of thought for any definite purpose is dead ; and though the body lives, a corpse might as well be spoken to as a living creature in such a plight. Such was the Nawab in his last march. When there was a trifling delay at any village, Sozun would sometimes go to him, try to rouse him, take him a cup of water or milk, or a cake of bread, which some charitable housewife had offered her in the name of God and the Prophet. He who had been pampered in luxury loathed the coarse food offered to him. Water was his only cry, and he drank it greedily. He seemed to understand nothing. He could only complain that his bonds hurt him ; that it was cold, and he shivered ; or that the sun burned him : and he flung himself about violently on his rude bed, or, raising himself up, implored, in accents of abject entreaty, those nearest to him to despatch him—to release him—'he would go away—he would harm no one—he would never return. By their children—by their mothers—for the love of Allah—let his life be spared. What had he done ? Was there no pity ?'

Who pitied him ? No one, except the poor Afghan girl, hurried along with him to the same death, as she believed, which awaited him, and that would be welcome to her. She had done her duty ; and sinner as she was, could remember and repeat the holy English words which Ralph Smithson had taught her. So the night passed. There was no staying to rest or to sleep. The wild procession hurried on by the glare of torchlight, waking whole villages from their slumbers, and passing them like a hideous nightmare—a rabble rout of demons, as it were—polluting the peaceful night with shouts and execrations.

As they neared the capital next day, the crowd which followed the litter, marched with it or preceded it, increased mightily. As before, men fought with each other as to who should be its bearers, and those who carried it were from time to time jostled out of their places to make room for others. The litter heaved and surged among them; but they went on with wild rushes which increased in speed—a torrent of men and women, howling, shrieking, screaming with frantic laughter—which, if by night it was indistinct and horrible, had now grown into a grotesque but dreadful reality. As the old Derwesh still shouted his cry of ‘Dohai Feringi!’ he was answered by ringing yells of ‘Feringi ke jey! Victory to the English! Clive Sahib ke Futteh! Victory to Clive! Victory to Meer Jaffier! Death to the Nawab!’ mingled with the shrill hootings of boys, and the screams of withered hags, who, running till they were out of breath, spat at the wretched creature as he lay writhing and cowering under his blanket, beat their withered breasts, and howled the death-wail in his ears. I only wonder that, coward as the man was, he lived through the horror of his last dreadful march, or reached Moorshedabad at all; but he did reach it.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOMEWARDS

MEER JAFFIER had arrived, and the city was busy. The streets were choked with people from the country; dealers had spread out their wares, and singers and buffoons were perambulating the streets singing ballads of Clive and the battle of Plassey, and good-humour prevailed. Clive might arrive that evening, and householders were setting out earthen cups on the terraces and balustrades of their houses, and filling them with oil for the illumination. Flower-sellers were stringing garlands of jessamine, and sweetmeat-vendors were hawking parched rice or pease for hungry sightseers. Suddenly there arose a wild cry, as it were of shouts

from the outskirts of the town. Some said the Nawab had returned with an army, and fled away; others thought Clive had come: and before any one had time to reflect, the strange procession passed by like a whirlwind, led by the Derwesh, cantering on in front on his tall bony horse, shouting, 'Clear the way—clear the way! Dohai Feringi!' and tossing his arms wildly into the air. Hard on his heels followed the mob of village folk, some armed to the teeth, some with long bamboos, clubs with heavy iron rings, or stout quarter-staves, encircling the litter, and the pony which carried Sozun, led now at a rapid trot. 'To the palace—to the palace—to Meer Jaffier!' was now the cry. No one dared oppose this torrent; but what was that in the midst of it? None knew then; and when it had gone by, those who remained were told that the Nawab, Suraj-oo-Doulah, was gone before them to his death.

'To the palace! to the palace! Dohai Feringi!' was heard by Ralph Smithson and Mr. Watts as they stood in the court, and asked vainly for explanation. A few moments afterwards, the Derwesh trotted into the gate, standing up in his stirrups, and whirling his steel trident above his head, while his cry never ceased and was followed by the rabble who bore the Nawab.

'Are you Clive?' asked the breathless Derwesh, whose mouth was dry and parched, his lips speckled with foam, and his eyes glowing red and fierce from among his matted locks. 'Are you Clive?' he asked of each, as his eye glanced from the one to the other. 'I have brought the Nawab, and I demand justice—justice from the English!' The man was fearful to look upon, and both shrank back involuntarily.

'I am not Clive, I am Mr. Watts; what justice can I do for thee?'

'For this,' cried the Derwesh, lifting his hair from his ears, and showing the white scars of his mutilation. 'Justice for this! Can he disfigure a servant of the Most High God and live? Kill him!'

'I cannot kill him, Bawa Sahib,' said Mr. Watts, gravely; but I will see to his safety. Let Meer Jaffier deal with him.'

And that wretch, crouching on the bed which had been set down, rocking himself to and fro, bowing down his head, for he was still pinioned, crying, 'O Mr. Watts! O Mr. Watts!—save me—save me! they will kill me: take all my money—all my jewels, and let me go! O Mr. Watts, by your mother, by Jesus of Nazareth and His mother Mary—' that was the Nawab! that Suraj-oo-Doulah! Bah! he was a sickening sight; and Ralph Smithson, who had been fascinated for a moment, turned away his head and spat out his disgust. Some guards had come from the gate, and Mr. Watts was giving orders to them.

'Sahib, Sahib, this is another—kill her!' cried a burly villager armed to the teeth, dragging along a weary pony covered with sweat, on which a woman was seated. 'Shall I dash out her brains?' and he whirled his iron-bound club round his finger and thumb, causing it to whistle through the air, as he plucked away the scarf with which Sozun had tied up her face with the other.

'Sozun!' cried Ralph, pushing away the man and a crowd of others, 'why art thou here?'

'O brother, God hath again sent thee to me,' she said, stretching out her arms to him; 'I tried to save him, but it was not to be.'

'Come,' he replied, and he led away the pony out of the wondering people, 'Julia and the Begum are safe: they will tend thee—come;' and they passed on into an inner court, no one following them. A few more moments, and the girl was at rest in loving arms.

The villagers followed them with staring eyes, till they were lost to view. 'She is one of the Feringis,' said the man who, a moment before, would have dashed out her brains with his club. 'Did ye not see how white she was?'

'Ah, yes,' said another, 'there was a story that a Feringi woman had been brought from Calcutta, and that is she! we ought to get a reward for her. Come and ask.'

'Not I,' said the first speaker; 'who knows but she might have us blown away from guns? I shall go home. Come away, these Feringis are devils if provoked—come, let us follow the Derwesh and the Nawab.'

We need not follow them to the last dread scene of all, which was not long delayed. The Derwesh never left his captive ; and when that afternoon the dread messengers of death came to the miserable man and did their office, he stood by, and recited the prayers for the dying. They said of him afterwards, that he dipped his fingers in the warm blood of his enemy, and put them to his ears ; bound up his matted hair over them, and afterwards the weird figure of the old man disappeared from the city, and was never more seen.

When the Begum was removed from the palace to the house of her husband's mother—the dear old lady, whose interest in the English is matter of history—she took Sozun with her. Strong as the girl had been, the fearful trial and fatigue of the Nawab's last march, as the people called it in mockery, had broken her down, and long rest and care were needful. When Julia Wharton had to depart—and that event was not long delayed—I question which of the three women was in the bitterest grief. Had she desired it, the Nawab's mother would have given her a free home for life, free to come and go after the manner of her people ; but it is needless to say this could not be : there were yet ties in England, and in India that one horrible memory which would haunt her all her life.

Before Julia Wharton left the city, Ralph Smithson had engaged her passage to England. She was now very rich, for under the success of Mr. Wharton's speculations, and the full compensation for all public and private losses, which was paid by the new Nawab, the settlement upon her was largely increased ; and I think had she chosen to stay in Calcutta, what she had undergone would have proved no obstacle to honourable proposals. On one point, however, she was uniformly silent. She never spoke of her English antecedents, nor did Ralph Smithson attempt to discover them, or lead her to speak of them ; whatever they might be, was a mystery which were better, perhaps, left at rest. Her desire to leave India was genuine, and Ralph could gather that it was in England only that she looked for any chance of happiness in her future life.

When the worthy Don Gomez, and many other friends, bade Ralph a cheerful adieu on the quarterdeck of the *Valiant*, and the merry song of the sailors heaving the anchor rang in his ears, his spirit rose as the good ship once more bounded onwards to dear England.

'Give this letter to your worthy uncle, Ralph,' said Mr. Clive, as he had bade him farewell (it was that dated 4th July, 1757, which is seen in Mr. Darnell's picture). 'I have writ him all he will care to know about our affairs; and though he and I don't exactly agree in all matters, I think he will allow that this hath been a glorious victory. Tell them all, Ralph, that I think, work, and live only for the glory of England, and that this victory is but a step to a dominion at which the world shall marvel hereafter—the thin end of the wedge, which I will drive as far as I can, and which others will drive home. Tell them all this, if my motives are questioned, as they will be; but I fear no ill consequences, Ralph. My own heart, under God, who rules all, tells me it is for the best; and though the end may be stayed, it cannot alter. What will India be in a hundred years, ay, and in a hundred years after that? I think I can see; but people would call Robert Clive mad were he to tell it. Farewell, my dear boy! If England is dull, come to me again,—for there is honour, glory, ay, and wealth too, if you desire it, to be won in Robert Clive's company.'

NOTES

Chapter I

Gipsy's plunder of her dead father: Sozun had accompanied her father when in 1747 the Afghans invaded India hoping to capture Delhi but were overthrown and driven back at the battle of Sirhind. Her father was killed and Sozun was seized by some plundering gipsies and taken away as a slave. However, she was kindly treated and was eventually sold to Chunda Kour who kept up a very imposing establishment of dancing girls and singers at Delhi.

A Tuwaf: The taw'af is the circular movement round the Ka'ba. So here it means 'one who goes round and round—'

Kaffirs: Infidels, unbelievers: a name formerly given by the Arabs of East Africa to all pagan natives of Africa.

Feringis : Franks or Europeans. Originally the word was applied by the Moslems to their Christian enemies in the Crusades.

Ameen : May it be so.

Chapter II

The English Factory : Not of course a factory in the modern sense but a trading settlement or post. For a description of a Factory see chapter IV, section 2. The young civil servants were known as 'factors' or 'writers'.

All Verdy Khan : He was the Viceroy of Behar who became ruler of Bengal in 1740 and at the time of his death in 1756 was virtually, if not actually, independent of Delhi. He had won distinction by his repulse of the Mahrattas. He was succeeded as ruler of Bengal by his son Suraj-oo-Doula, aged nineteen.

Mashalla : An exclamation of astonishment. Compare 'By Jove' in English slang.

Inshalla : Please God.

The Company : The East India Company was granted a royal charter by Queen Elizabeth 1600 A.D. In 1657 Cromwell renewed its charter providing that the Indian trade should be in the hands of a single joint stock company. Charles II granted it five charters so that it grew from a simple trading company into a great chartered company with the right to acquire territory, coin money, command fortresses and troops, form alliances, make war and peace and exercise both civil and criminal jurisdiction. After Plassey the British Government gradually increased its share in the Government of India until in 1858 the Indian administration was entirely transferred from the Company to the Crown.

Chapter III

Ralph Smithson : Ralph has assumed his mother's maiden name. There were three Darnell brothers : Sir Geoffrey the baronet, Roger the merchant and Henry, Ralph's father. Henry had secretly married a girl beneath him in rank. He and his young wife were accidentally drowned when Ralph was a baby. The legality of the marriage lacked proof ; this was an obstacle to Ralph's succession to the baronetcy. Neither of his uncles had any sons. Sir Geoffrey in making his will had laid upon Ralph the burden of proving himself legitimate. This unexpected shame was a great blow to Ralph who allowed himself to be over-persuaded by unscrupulous 'friends' to permit them at a price to get possession of the will and to destroy it. Sir Geoffrey's coach was attacked by night on his way home to Melcepeeth from London and in the scuffle Sir Geoffrey was wounded by a pistol ball, though not seriously. Roger Darnell, in whose London office Ralph had worked for some years, learnt by chance of the share his nephew had had in this highway robbery and thought it best to get Ralph out of the country. He had him kidnapped by

Captain Scrafton of the merchant ship *Valiant* and taken to Calcutta to work under Mr. Wharton, the Calcutta agent of the firm.

Chapter IV

What booted the English letters of remonstrance : Of what use or profit were the letters . . . ? *Cf.* the phrases 'bootless' (=useless), 'to boot' =into the bargain.

The Moors . . . : The Muhammadans.

Longanimity of physionomies : The worthy Don's English is decidedly queer ; he means 'long faces.' *Cf.* the phrase 'to pull a long face' (to look miserable).

Birdcage Walk : A fashionable promenade in S. James' Park, London.

Chapter V

One of the Indiamen : Ships trading with the East Indies were called Indiamen.

I suspect they don't like cannister : Bullets in a tin box fired from cannon without fuse.

I am laying her myself : To lay a gun means to aim a gun.

It's too far for the grape : Grape-shot, small lead balls put in a tin to make a scattering charge for cannon.

Ye'll be frae the North : Frae=from.

The burr : A rough sounding accent of the *r* as heard in some Northern English dialects. It is caused by the trilling of the uvula against the back of the tongue instead of the trilling of the tip of the tongue against the hard palate.

Dear old Melcepeth ! : Sir Geoffrey Darnell's mansion in Northumberland ; the scene of Ralph's boyhood.

A' made bow'd t' speak : I made bold to speak.

Ye ken : You know.

He had warped the ship : To warp a ship is to haul a ship in some desired direction by a rope attached to a fixed point.

Her broadside commanded the green space : All the guns on one side of the ship could be fired simultaneously over the green space.

A can of grog all round : Every man had a ration of spirit and water served out to him.

Chapter VI

English ensigus flying from their mizen-peaks : The mizen-mast was the aftermost mast in a three-masted ship.

Chand Beebee of Ahmednugger : In 1595 Akbar's forces besieged the city but could not capture it because of the vigorous and heroic defence of the dowager-queen Chānd Bibī.

Chapter VII

To leave spiked the heavy gun : To spike a gun means to plug up the touch-hole and so render it useless.

(1) Country-dance ; (2) Minuet ; (3) Cotillon : (1) = any rural or native English dance especially those in which the couples stand face to face in two long lines, (2) = a slow stately dance for two, (3) = a ball-room dance in which several couples took part ; most probably in origin a rural dance.

Good old Job Charnock's time : The founder of Calcutta who finally succeeded in establishing the Factory there in 1690.

Chapter VIII

Cawnpore : A reference to the siege of Cawnpore in the Indian Mutiny of 1857.

Chapter IX

Boarding pikes : A kind of spear used to repel enemies trying to board a ship.

John Company : A popular nickname for the East India Company.

Chapter X

Frac Berrik : From Berwick-on-Tweed, an English town on the Scottish border.

A wee bit goud : A little gold ; some money.

In a Babel of languages : A confused noise of different languages. See the Bible, Genesis xi. 9.

An' the drooth's sair : The drought (thirst) is sore.

If they'll come till me : To me.

Chapter XV

The office in Lombard Street : Roger Darnell's office in London.

Chapter XVI

The morale : The moral condition of soldiers as regards discipline and confidence.

Primus in Indis : The First in India.

Chapter XVIII

Bismilla : In God's name ; if God so wills it.

Chapter XIX

Some purlieus of the native town : Purlieus means outlying parts,—outskirts.

CHAPTER XX

The *mêlée* : The confused fight.

CHAPTER XXI

Monsieur Crapaud's flagstaff : *Crapaud* in French means a toad. The French are fond of eating certain parts of certain species of frogs: hence the nickname 'Froggy' or, as here, Crapaud. The Englishman's nickname is John Bull.

M. Bussy = Monsieur (Mr.) Bussy

M. Law = Monsieur (Mr.) Law.

Hung as high as Haman : See the Bible, The Book of Esther, chap. 7. Haman, chief minister to King Ahasuerus [Xerxes] of Persia, circa 485 B.C., was not bowed to by Mordecai the Jew. Haman plots his destruction and prepares a high gallows for him but by the pleading of Queen Esther, a Jewess, he himself was hanged on this gallows fifty cubits high.

Chapter XXII

Robert Clive: 1725-1774. The statesman and general, founder of the British Empire of India.

See Macaulay's essay on Clive for accounts of his great exploit 'The Defence of Arcot' and of the battle of Plassey.

The India House: The East India Company's headquarters in London.

Sabit Jung Bahadur ke futteh : Sabit Jung, 'daring in war', was the nickname given to Clive.

Deen ! Deen ! : The Faith ! The Faith !

Chapter XXIII

Salt junk : Salted meat.

His friends the Messieurs : His friends the French. 'Messieurs' is the plural of Monsieur (Mr.)

Chapter XXV

Ya-Allah Kureem ! God the Merciful.

Dohai Feringi ! Do justice, O foreigner !

Chapter XXVI

The justice of the Nazarenes ! : i.e. of the Christians.

Chapter XXVII

No obstacle to honourable proposals : Proposals of marriage.

